

## **SPECIAL EDUCATION TASK FORCE REPORT ON NEW BUSINESS ITEM 01-18**

The Special Education Task Force was created as a result of New Business Item 18 which passed the 2001 Representative Assembly. The group was to address the following issues: Certificated and ESP shortages, legislation, financial shortfalls, student/family/advocate difficulties, program needs, isolation due to transient nature of the job and professional development needs.

The task force has met four times since October. To date the following tasks have been accomplished:

1. Certificated and ESP shortages. The task force has created and disseminated a survey to identify the retention, recruitment and re-entry issues for certificated special education teachers and ESA personnel. The results of the survey will guide our recommendations in this area for certificated personnel. Additional information regarding the recruitment and retention of ESP personnel in special education will be gathered when we have a clearer picture of the effects of the ESEA legislation on instructional assistants.
2. Certificated and ESP shortages. The task force has been researching recruitment and retention of personnel and has gathered recruitment and retention materials from a variety of sources. We will be making a recommendation on a statewide retention and recruitment campaign this spring.
3. Certificated shortages. The task force has identified and addressed the issues that affect our members through bargaining and legislation. The governmental relations staff has worked with the task force to address the issue of (a) the failure of the state to pay bonuses to ESA personnel who have national board certification, (b) the need for prior related service credit to recruit and retain ESA certificated personnel and (c) the inequity in the retirement system which excludes ESA personnel from receiving the same retirement considerations as a teacher who works less than full time. The task force has also developed recommended bargaining language that address the needs of our special education personnel. The language will be available to all Uniserv directors and local presidents.
4. Financial shortages. The Task Force reviewed the current funding system in Washington State. The greatest shortfall in funding programs is the state's failure to adequately support basic education. The special education funding is a ratio of the basic education funding and therefore increases each time the basic education funding increases. In addition, the districts are required for the first time to use a consistent accounting practice this year. We will monitor the results of the accounting change and provide additional information at the end of the year. Until we can more adequately determine how districts spend the current funds received for special education, it would be difficult to make a case for additional special education funding. We will review this decision at a later time.
5. Financial shortages. The task force has created a tutorial for Uniserv staff, local presidents and members to use so that they can easily understand the current funding mechanism and accounting procedures for special education expenditures in their district.
6. Student/family/advocate difficulties. The task force has discussed issues related to this topic with a parent advocate.

### Recommendations:

The Special Education Task Force requests that the group be continued for another year. The issues the task force is addressing are very complex and need continued work. The tasks which need to be accomplished in the upcoming year are:

- Work with communications to design and implement a recruitment, retention and re-entry campaign to increase the numbers of people entering, staying and returning to special education
- Continue to coordinate the efforts of the ESA groups to ensure legislative support for prior related experience, national board certification recognition and retirement equity
- Develop an understanding of the effects of the ESEA legislation on the recruitment and retention of special education instructional assistants and make recommendations to WEA in this area
- Research and make recommendations regarding the professional development needs of special education personnel