

2024



COLLEGE CHANGES EVERYTHING[®]
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Illinois State University's PULSE: Helping Communities Develop Special Educators from Within

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ISU PULSE

PARAPROFESSIONALS UNLOCKING
LICENSURE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

*ILLINOIS
STATE*



The Situation

2020 ISBE Report

Special Education had the highest rate of vacant positions (753) with 2.5%

2023 ISBE Report

Increased number of vacant special education positions (1,102) with 4.94%



The Situation

2023 Advance Illinois Report

Teacher vacancies have a disproportionate impact on:

- Black and Latino students
- Students from low-income households
- Bilingual students
- Students with disabilities

2023 ISBE Teacher Vacancy Grants

170 districts eligible for funds

60% to rural, 40% to urban



STATE

The Situation



In 2023-24, there were **34,631** special education paraprofessionals working in Illinois

Many are interested in becoming licensed, special education teachers, but many challenges and barriers exist for them:

- High cost of higher education
- In-person only special education licensure programs
- Past academic challenges
- Teacher licensure examinations
- Lack of support from employer
- “Stopping out” to student teach

The Solution



Illinois State University

Illinois State University is the largest producer of teachers in the Midwest and ranks in the top 5 percent in the U.S. for quality and value, according to College Factual.

Department of Special Education

Our special education department is ranked #7 in the nation by College Factual and is the 9th largest preparer of special educators in the U.S.

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The Solution – PULSE

PULSE:

Paraprofessionals Unlocking Licensure in Special Education

- 2-year online program
- Graduates earn a Bachelor's degree in Special Education along with their Professional Educator's License (PEL) and Learning Behavior Specialist I (LBS I) endorsement
- Participants stay employed throughout the program; no “stop-out” for clinicals or student teaching semesters
- Cohort-based



The Solution – PULSE

High cost of higher education

- Nearly 40% of participants pay no tuition/fees
- Multiple financial aid options available
 - Private foundation scholarships
 - SETTW
 - TEACH, MTI, Golden Apple, PELL, MAP Grants
 - District/employer reimbursements

Online-only special education licensure programs

- Fully online program; students never come to campus
- Maintain high academic rigor in an online format

Past academic challenges

- A holistic view of applicants' experience
- Dedicated academic advisor, student success coach, clinical coordinator
- Specifically trained faculty/instructors for the program

The Solution – PULSE

Teacher licensure examinations

- Academic and financial support dedicated to exam preparation
- Student success coach conducts 1:1 study sessions
- So far, 14/17 or 82% of candidates passed the exam on their first attempt

Lack of support from the employer

- District/cooperative employers involved in the application process
- Must allow candidates to complete clinicals and student teaching within their district
- Individual MOUs developed and signed for each district

“Stopping out” to student teach

- Candidates are employed in their paraprofessional positions throughout the program
- Maintain their salary and benefits
- STT requirements modified to meet both licensure requirements within the scope of their paraprofessional position

The Solution – PULSE

Who are PULSE Candidates?

2023 cohort: 58 students

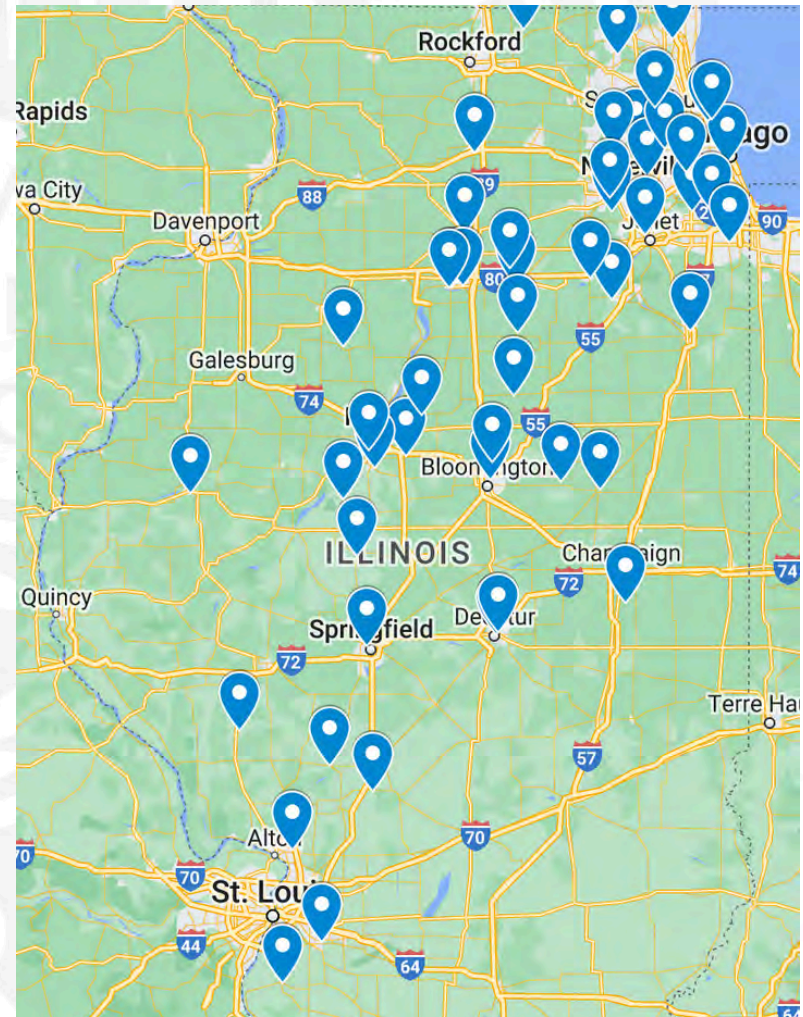
2024 cohort: 71 students

Districts/Coops: 98

Average Age: 40

Average years of experience: 4.5 years

Diversity: 30% from underrepresented ethnicities



Impact of PULSE Student Testimonials

Chicago Area Cohort

A paraprofessional in CPS since 2012 and never thought she would be able to go to college. Her husband passed away and she learned of the PULSE program. She is eager to apply what she is learning in her courses and shares her new knowledge with educators in her setting.

Northern/Central IL Cohort

Supports Spanish speaking learners in middle and high school. She loves the close relationships that she has created with families and wants to learn how to help learners advocate for themselves during the IEP process. Her husband works the night shift, and she expressed the challenges of being a parent and student.

Southern/Eastern IL Cohort

Para for 18 years and is very in-tuned to mental health and meditation. She expressed such gratitude for the development of this program and is now able to gain licensure when she didn't think this was an option. Expressed that the program is rigorous but appreciates all that she is learning. She also serves as a caregiver for her parent.

Impact of PULSE

Community Impact

Districts/cooperatives able to “grow their own” special education teachers

Paraprofessionals more likely to be retained both in the field of special education and within the district they work

50% of PULSE participants work in districts eligible for ISBE Teacher Vacancy Grant funds

30% candidates from underrepresented ethnicities, whereas currently only 16.5% of teacher workforce in IL



Impact of PULSE

Initial success of PULSE has led to more financial aid opportunities for our students

- Golden Apple Accelerators
- \$2.1 Million in Private Foundational Scholarships
- ISBE Teacher Vacancy Pilot Grants
- Greater district support



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Future Goals

- Expand access to the program
- Continue to target the highest-need districts
- Model to innovate other traditional teacher education programming
- Help close the teacher representation gap



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Thank You!

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