

Case Study: Building a Strong Team of Special Education Teachers



It's long been a challenge to hire special education teachers, but post-COVID, special-ed classrooms are even harder to fill.

Students came back with more challenging behaviors and mental-health needs, said J. Trina Smith, Director of the Department of Exceptional Students for [Clayton County Public Schools in Georgia](#). And special education positions already come with a growing list of state requirements and mountains of paperwork.

"I don't lie to the staff," Smith said. "It's a hard position to teach. And the job is not getting easier — it's getting harder."

About Clayton County Public Schools

- 6th largest school system in GA
- 50,000+ students
- 7,400+ employees
- Nearly 70 schools

Special Education at CCPS

- 5,900 students with disabilities
- 620 special education teachers
- 425 paraprofessionals

Source: Clayton County Public Schools

The need: An accelerated certification pathway for special education teachers

The solution: A partnership with Moreland University

Savings: \$34,200

An Accelerated Path

Clayton County is the sixth largest school system in Georgia, with more than 50,000 students, 7,400 employees, and nearly 70 school sites.

CCPS' special education program is home to 5,900 students with disabilities served by 620 special education teachers and 425 paraprofessionals.

The district has several initiatives to help teachers earn professional certifications, including an in-house program called TAPP, Teacher Academy of Preparation and Pedagogy. But TAPP is a 2-year cert program, and Smith wanted a faster option for her special-ed teachers.

Moreland University's [TEACH-NOW Teacher Preparation Certificate Program](#) is only 9 months, so Smith and the HR team at CCPS worked with Moreland to set up a partnership. **For the 2024-25 school year, CCPS covered TEACH-NOW tuition for 36 special education teachers. Moreland offered a discounted tuition rate, for a total savings of \$34,200.***

In exchange for the tuition coverage, the CCPS teachers agreed to stay with the district for at least 3 years. So along with helping teachers earn professional certifications, the partnership leads to increased retention.

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Clayton County Public Schools is investing in teachers. And while there's an upfront cost to cover tuition, it will more than pay off down the line because those teachers will have a strong foundation from their EPP and, importantly, they will know their school district believes in and supports them as professionals.

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Susanne H. Thompson, Ed.D. | Moreland University President

The CCPS teachers in Moreland's TEACH-NOW program are enjoying the quick pace, Smith said, and they're able to immediately apply the lessons in their classrooms.

For some teachers with temporary certifications, they need more time on the front end to test and get used to the classroom. That means they need a quicker EPP before their certification window closes with the state department of education.

Moreland has been "a really good answer" for that problem, Smith said. "I would definitely recommend it in that regard. And it's worked for plenty of people who have already been through it."

*For districts with more than 30 teachers who need a professional certification, Moreland offers a discounted tuition rate.

A Supportive Partner

Along with the added benefit of guaranteed retention, covering tuition for Moreland's TEACH-NOW program allows CCPS to better compete with some of the larger districts in the area, said Catherine Hale Henry, CCPS Recruitment and Retention Manager.

Hale Henry likes Moreland in particular because of the accelerated timeline and the global cohort model, which allows candidates to learn and grow with a small, diverse group. CCPS students speak more than 70 languages, Hale Henry said, so that diversity is important.

On the HR side, she said, Moreland is a welcoming, supportive partner.



With a lot of universities, it's not the kind of relationship where they're going to come and actually sit in front of you and have a conversation: 'Where do you need me? What can I do? How can I make this work?' With Moreland, I never felt like we were a number.



Catherine Hale Henry

Clayton County Public Schools
Recruitment & Retention Mgr.

Moreland + Clayton County Public Schools



Timeline: 1 year



Goal: Clayton County Public Schools wanted a faster certification option for special education teachers.



Solution: CCPS partnered with Moreland University. Moreland's TEACH-NOW program is only 9 months, compared to 2 years for some other alternative certification programs.



Result: CCPS covered tuition for 36 special education teachers. Moreland offered a discounted tuition rate, for a total savings of \$34,200.



Bonus: In exchange for tuition coverage, the CCPS teachers agreed to stay with the district for at least 3 years, building in guaranteed retention.