What financial assistance is available?
Individuals seeking careers in special education are eligible for the financial assistance available to all students. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), funds programs that support students becoming special educators.

How do I know if this career is for me?
There are three things that can help you decide whether becoming a special educator is a good career option for you:

- Volunteer in a special education classroom. You will gain experience with many students and discover the skills needed to teach children with special needs.
- Complete a service-learning experience by being involved in a special education-related activity as a youth.
- Talk with special educators. Find out why they chose this profession and what they find challenging and rewarding about their work.

I want to become a special educator. What should I do now?
TEACH California explains the credentialing process, provides financial aid information, and identifies the next steps you need to take to become a credentialed special education teacher in California. For more information, log onto www.teachcalifornia.org

This brochure and other teacher recruitment materials may be downloaded for free. Log on to www.teachcalifornia.org, select Learn More, then Recruitment Materials.

Funds for this project come from a federal grant, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), to the California Department of Education.
What do special educators do?
Special educators provide specially designed instruction to individuals with disabilities and support to their families. Special educators assess learning abilities, adapt materials, modify curriculum, and consult with other teachers.

Who are special education students?
These are students who require specially designed instruction because of:
- Cognitive impairments
- Learning disabilities that require specific teaching strategies
- Physical disabilities that limit mobility
- Sensory loss, such as hearing loss and vision impairments
- Emotional disorders
- Traumatic brain injury
- Autism
- Speech or language impairments
- Chronic health problems

Where do special educators work?
One of the benefits of being a special educator is the variety of settings in which one can work, including:
- General education. Special educators consult, collaborate and co-teach with general education teachers and other service providers.
- Resource or Learning Centers. In this setting, specialized instruction is provided for part of the day, individually or in groups.
- Self-contained classrooms. This is a classroom specifically for children with disabilities.
- Itinerant (traveling) teaching.
- Home/hospital settings.
- Youth authority facilities.

What are the credentialing requirements?

a. Special educators are highly trained individuals who must complete a set of requirements, related to the following, in order to receive the Preliminary Education Specialist Instruction Credential:
   i. an undergraduate degree
   ii. a basic skills requirement
   iii. a subject-matter competency test or completed a teacher preparation program
   iv. a Commission-approved subject-matter program
   v. a Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA) test
   vi. a course or examination in the U.S. Constitution

b. The second stage is the Clear Education Specialist Instruction Credential. To obtain this, you must have completed a clear credential program through a Commission-approved Induction Program specifically for special education.

c. Additionally, there are a number of authorizations for special education teaching one can add to an existing California teaching credential designed to broaden the teaching pool.

What are the “areas of specialization”?
There are six areas of specialization, depending on the students’ disabilities, in which persons become authorized to teach:
- **Mild/Moderate.** Includes specific learning disabilities, mild/moderate intellectual disabilities, other health impairments, serious emotional disturbance, and autism spectrum disorders
- **Moderate/Severe.** Includes autism, deaf-blindness, moderate to severe intellectual disabilities, multiple disabilities, and serious emotional disturbance
- **Deaf and Hard of Hearing.** Includes deafness, hearing impairment, and deaf-blindness
- **Visual Impairments.** Includes blindness, visual impairment, and deaf-blindness
- **Physical and Health Impairments.** Includes orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, multiple disabilities and traumatic brain injury
- **Early Childhood Special Education.** Includes mild/moderate and moderate/severe disabilities listed above and traumatic brain injury, and authorizes service to children ages birth to pre-kindergarten only
- **Language and Academic Development.** Includes providing services to students with academic communication and language needs, but does not take the place of speech and language services

How long will it take me to become fully credentialed?
The length of time depends on your current educational level and the type of teacher credential program you enter. The Preliminary Education Specialist Instruction Credential can be completed within one to two years if you already have your undergraduate degree and can demonstrate subject matter competency. The Clear Education Specialist Instruction Credential requirements must be completed within five years of obtaining the Preliminary Credential.