

Media Relations

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UNH Awarded \$1.25M for Early Childhood Special Education

DURHAM, N.H. – The University of New Hampshire has been awarded a five-year federal grant of \$1.25 million from the U.S. Department of Education for the Early Childhood Special Education Assistive Technology (SEAT) Project, which will allow UNH to meet the regional workforce needs of highly qualified teachers for children with disabilities through third grade.

The Early Childhood SEAT Project will prepare 40 early childhood special education teachers with a specialty in assistive technology. The strength of the project is that it combines expertise in special education with assistive technology.

“Assistive technology focuses on giving individuals with disabilities greater independence in daily life. It could be something as simple as preferred seating in the front to an electronic device that helps a child communicate,” said Leslie Couse, associate professor of education and lead researcher for the project.

“Research has found that assistive technology has the potential to promote learning, development, communication, and participation of young children with disabilities in social situations and classroom routines,” Couse said.

The grant will provide up to \$20,000 in support for each special education teacher to earn a master's degree, certification in early childhood special education and a graduate certificate in assistive technology. The project will partner with local schools and agencies to integrate the iPad as a teaching tool with young children.

Early childhood is the period from birth to 8 years old. Early childhood special educators focus on children's developmental and educational needs within their home, school, and community. Teachers certified in this area typically work in early intervention, preschool, or elementary school settings.

Early childhood special education is an area of critical teacher shortage both nationally and in the New England region, Couse said. The number of preschool children receiving special education services increased 23 percent while the number of infants and toddlers receiving early intervention nearly doubled since 1995.

According to New Hampshire Employment Security, between 2010 and 2020, total employment in New Hampshire will increase by 10.4 percent while the demand for early childhood special educators will increase by 12.7 percent.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

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