



2026

SPECIAL EDUCATION STAFFING INDUSTRY REPORT

INTRODUCTION

At Sunbelt, our job is to equip your district with the professionals you need to ensure that your students shine. Whether you are a district decision-maker or a school leader, we hope that this report inspires you to build strong, sustainable teams that are ready to help your students thrive.

With schools across the United States learning to navigate critical staff shortages, especially within special education and key support roles, understanding the changing talent landscape is more important than ever. This report covers nationwide and regional trends with the goal of equipping education leaders with the data and context needed to handle staffing shortages strategically and confidently.

All data and figures in this report are sourced from the **National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)**, the **Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)**, and **Lightcast Analyst**, ensuring every insight is backed by the most comprehensive labor data available.

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STAFFING INDUSTRY TRENDS

Rising Special Education Enrollment

The number of IDEA-eligible students in the United States reached nearly 8 million by the fall of 2023. That's an increase of 3.4% over the previous year. At that growth rate, an additional 1 million students required services at the end of 2025, resulting in increased strain on our special education systems and providers.

Strain on Special Education Staffing

With a higher student demand than ever, vacancies nationwide present a growing issue. During the 2023-2024 school year, 70% of schools nationwide faced vacancies, and 74% of elementary and middle schools struggled to fill special education positions.

The demand for special education services may be rising, but the number of qualified professionals entering the field is shrinking. As a result, many positions remain unfilled or are staffed by unqualified employees, creating a high-pressure environment that fuels burnout and turnover. Year over year, 8.5% of teachers leave the profession entirely, and 9.2% of the remaining move to different schools. In fact, 50% of teachers leave their position within five years.

50%

Of teachers leave the
profession within
5 years



But staffing challenges extend beyond special education teachers. Student support staff, related service roles, and skilled professionals such as paraprofessionals, speech-language pathologists (SLPs), school psychologists, and other therapists are also in short supply, leaving school districts at risk of compliance violations. In recent years, school districts in multiple states have faced complaints filed with state officials regarding staffing shortages that have resulted in diminished special education services. It is especially important to note that

students in impoverished and diverse areas are statistically disproportionately affected by these staffing shortages.

Adapting Your Staffing Strategy

You don't have to face these staffing challenges alone. Staffing agencies like Sunbelt are here to relieve the pressure on your district staff, help you maintain IDEA compliance, and ensure that you have coverage for your vacancies. Our goal is to help you meet rising special education needs with confidence by expanding your reach to include qualified, contracted staff.

Today, we are seeing an increasing number of special education support professionals choosing contract and agency-based roles for their flexibility, support, and reduced burnout potential. In fact, 1 in 5 contract workers cite flexible work arrangements as the primary reason they chose agency roles. With some school professionals preferring agency-based roles over direct hire, this presents an opportunity for school districts to partner with specialized staffing agencies to gain access to these professionals who are only seeking contract opportunities. We'll handle the credentialing, compliance, and administrative requirements, and your school can enjoy the benefits of filling critical roles faster.

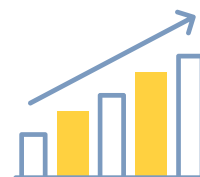
Leveraging a staffing agency expands your reach to candidates who prefer contract work. And, by extension, helps you achieve better outcomes for your students.

62%

Of public schools reported that there were too few available candidates applying to their open positions



Reliable data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and Lightcast highlights critical shortages across professions such as special education teachers, speech-language pathologists, school psychologists, and behavioral specialists.



SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

Special education teachers are the most important part of a student's journey with developmental delays or learning disabilities. Nationwide, the demand for qualified special education professionals continues to outgrow the available talent, creating urgent workforce gaps for many school districts.

Market Overview



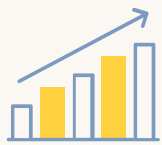
4,837

Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)



4,172

Annual Job Postings



2.6%

Projected Job Growth
(2024-2029)



220,267

Professionals Currently
Employed



Over 47,000

Teachers Approaching
Retirement Age



1,412

Employers Competing

Leading Graduate Programs for Special Education Teachers

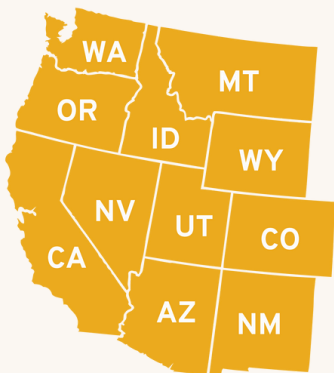
- Grand Canyon University
- Arizona State University
- Ball State University

What This Means

There is a significant gap between the number of available special education teachers and posted job openings. This directly impacts students' educational experiences and school districts' operational effectiveness. Partnering with a staffing agency—like Sunbelt—helps provide schools with reliable access to a pool of certified professionals who can help bridge that gap.

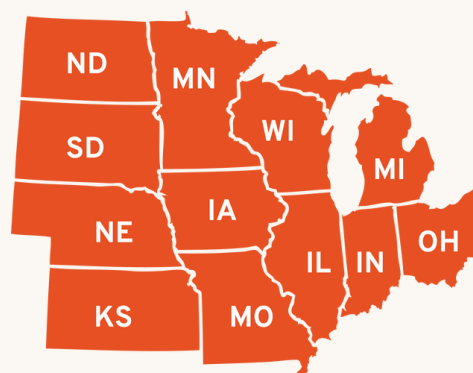
Regional Market Breakdown

West Division



- Current Employment: **33,730**
- Active Job Seekers: **634**
- Retiring Soon: **6,865**
- Annual Job Postings: **917**
- Projected Job Growth: **6.4%**

Midwest Division



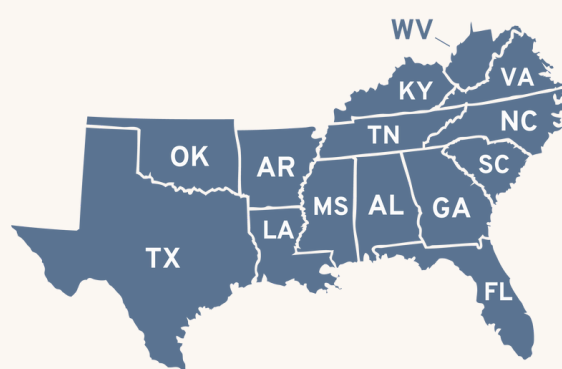
- Current Employment: **43,670**
- Active Job Seekers: **672**
- Retiring Soon: **9,287**
- Annual Job Postings: **925**
- Projected Job Growth: **1%**

Northeast Division



- Current Employment: **49,264**
- Active Job Seekers: **1,738**
- Retiring Soon: **11,392**
- Annual Job Postings: **995**
- Projected Job Growth: **2.4%**

South Division



- Current Employment: **93,603**
- Active Job Seekers: **1,793**
- Retiring Soon: **19,227**
- Annual Job Postings: **1,335**
- Projected Job Growth: **1.9%**

Staffing Insights



Persistent special education teacher shortages across higher compensation regions highlight an urgent need for school districts to leverage partnerships with staffing agencies. Without agile staffing solutions, schools risk disruptions in special education services, potentially disrupting IDEA compliance.

The Northeast and West regions offer candidates higher compensation but a limited candidate pool makes hiring more challenging. The Midwest provides a moderate cost environment which is ideal for attracting candidates, but an imbalance of job-seeking candidates to open jobs creates difficulty for schools to fill all of their open positions. The South experiences lower candidate compensation, which complicates talent retention efforts.

Utilizing Sunbelt as Your Staffing Partner

Sunbelt is an expert in matching qualified special education teachers with school districts nationwide. With thorough credentialing requirements and dedicated teams to help streamline the onboarding process, we are able to quickly find and place qualified teachers who will help your students shine.

To learn more about Sunbelt's services or request help finding qualified teachers for your school district, please visit our **[Request Professionals](#)** page.

SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS

Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) help students overcome a wide range of speech, language, and communication challenges, supporting one of the most essential skills for success both inside and outside of the classroom. As schools nationwide face high demand but limited supply of qualified candidates, understanding the current professional landscape is essential.

Market Overview

**113,229**Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)**186,942**

Annual Job Postings

**13.4%**Projected Job Growth
(2024-2029)**171,773**Professionals Currently
Employed**Nearly 30,000**SLPs Approaching
Retirement Age**7,204**

Employers Competing

Leading Graduate Programs for SLPs

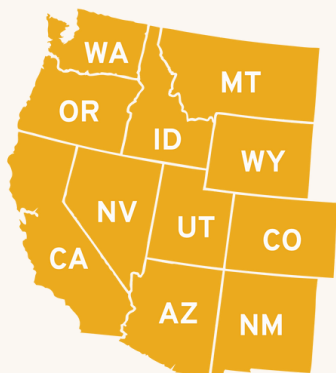
- Baylor University
- Emerson College
- Utah State University

What This Means

School districts are facing a shortage of qualified SLP candidates, making it challenging to fill vital vacancies quickly. Extended vacancies lead to compliance issues and decreased service quality as district staff take on growing caseloads. Partnering with an agency like Sunbelt can help you secure qualified professionals.

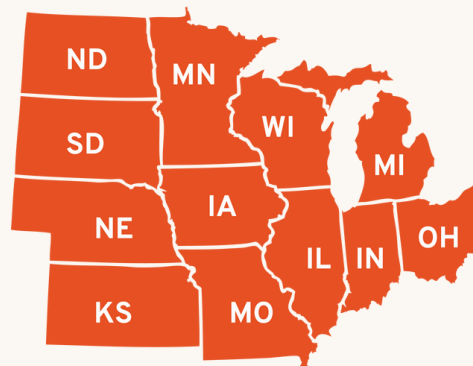
Regional Market Breakdown

West Division



- Current Employment: **32,176**
- Active Job Seekers: **21,952**
- Retiring Soon: **5,340**
- Annual Job Postings: **51,662**
- Projected Job Growth: **16.3%**

Midwest Division



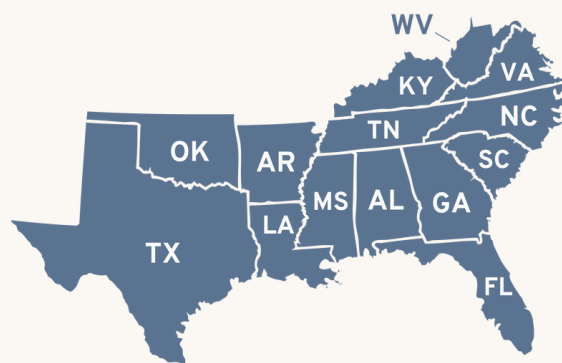
- Current Employment: **38,895**
- Active Job Seekers: **24,393**
- Retiring Soon: **6,817**
- Annual Job Postings: **42,112**
- Projected Job Growth: **10.7%**

Northeast Division



- Current Employment: **40,439**
- Active Job Seekers: **25,515**
- Retiring Soon: **7,756**
- Annual Job Postings: **30,367**
- Projected Job Growth: **11.7%**

South Division



- Current Employment: **64,473**
- Active Job Seekers: **37,078**
- Retiring Soon: **10,812**
- Annual Job Postings: **61,086**
- Projected Job Growth: **13.6%**

Staffing Insights



There is sustained demand for SLPs, particularly in high-growth regions such as the West, underscoring the growing need for school districts to prioritize strategic staffing solutions for hiring and retaining talent. Without finding quick staffing solutions, speech and language services are at risk of disruption and falling out of compliance with IDEA.

While the South represents the largest market in both talent supply and hiring demand, the West leads in compensation and projected job growth. The Northeast provides a more balanced mix of pay and opportunity, and the Midwest is seeing a more affordable labor market.

Utilizing Sunbelt as Your Staffing Partner

Sunbelt has the resources to find the right SLPs for your district. With a streamlined onboarding and credentialing process, as well as ongoing clinical support, we have the means to staff the right professional for your students and support them long-term.

To learn more about Sunbelt's services or request help finding qualified SLPs for your school district, please visit our **[Request Professionals](#)** page.

SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY ASSISTANTS

Speech-Language Pathology Assistants (SLPAs) play a crucial role in the delivery of speech therapy services, supporting speech therapy teams, and ensuring that services are delivered effectively to students. As demand for speech therapy services continues to rise, understanding the dynamics of the SLPA workforce becomes more important than ever.

Market Overview

**4,352**Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)**18,947**

Annual Job Postings

**5.9%**Projected Job Growth
(2024-2029)**105,206**Professionals Currently
Employed**Around 23,000**SLPAs Approaching
Retirement Age**1,342**

Employers Competing

Leading Graduate Programs for SLPAs

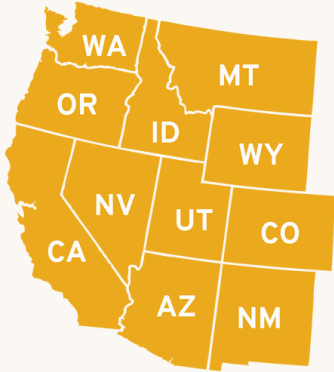
- Ivy Tech Community College
- Hillsborough Community College
- Black River Technical College

What This Means

As the demand for speech services rises, SLPAs continue to play a critical role in meeting these needs. The market is highly competitive, but relatively balanced—making consistent recruitment and retention efforts in school districts more important than ever. Sunbelt helps simplify this challenge by providing access to qualified and credentialed SLPA professionals to help fill openings quickly.

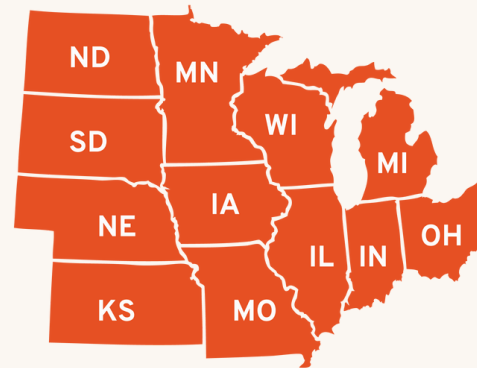
Regional Market Breakdown

West Division



- Current Employment: **30,485**
- Active Job Seekers: **1,745**
- Retiring Soon: **6,435**
- Annual Job Postings: **7,238**
- Projected Job Growth: **6.9%**

Midwest Division



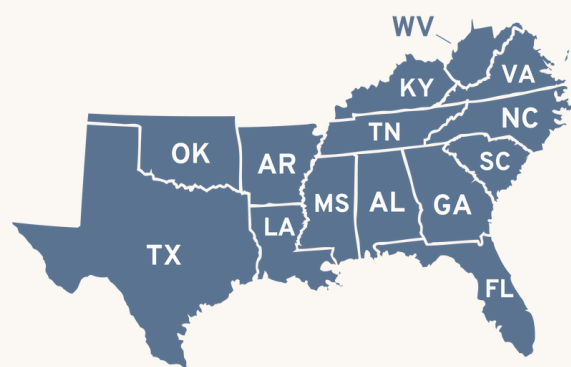
- Current Employment: **18,660**
- Active Job Seekers: **338**
- Retiring Soon: **3,863**
- Annual Job Postings: **3,029**
- Projected Job Growth: **4.0%**

Northeast Division



- Current Employment: **15,074**
- Active Job Seekers: **341**
- Retiring Soon: **3,604**
- Annual Job Postings: **2,075**
- Projected Job Growth: **5.6%**

South Division



- Current Employment: **40,987**
- Active Job Seekers: **1,928**
- Retiring Soon: **8,838**
- Annual Job Postings: **6,605**
- Projected Job Growth: **6.2%**

Staffing Insights



The SLPA market is dynamic, especially in high-demand regions such as the West and South. This emphasizes the need for districts to strategically partner with agencies to find proactive solutions. Long vacancies delay critical speech-language support, risking compliance failures.

The West leads in both compensation and projected job growth—showing strong market opportunity but also high competition. The South offers the largest employment volume, but low compensation creates retention challenges for school districts. The Northeast and Midwest provide moderate job growth and compensation, showing balanced recruitment opportunities in these regions.

Utilizing Sunbelt as Your Staffing Partner

By quickly connecting you with talented SLPAs, Sunbelt can streamline your hiring processes, address gaps in staffing, and ensure that high-quality speech services are delivered to your students without devastating delays in care.

To learn more about Sunbelt's services or request help finding qualified SLPAs for your school district, please visit our **[Request Professionals](#)** page.

SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

Sign language interpreters (SLIs) are an essential part of allowing deaf and hard-of-hearing students equal opportunities to communicate and learn in a school setting. They make a positive impact on the education and social skills learned by students across the nation by providing them with the same opportunities as their peers. As schools embrace inclusive practices, the demand for qualified interpreters rises.

Market Overview

**2,241**Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)**2,852**

Annual Job Postings

**6.8%**Projected Job Growth
(2024-2029)**60,797**Professionals Currently
Employed**About 12,500**SLIs Approaching
Retirement Age**585**

Employers Competing

Leading Graduate Programs for SLIs

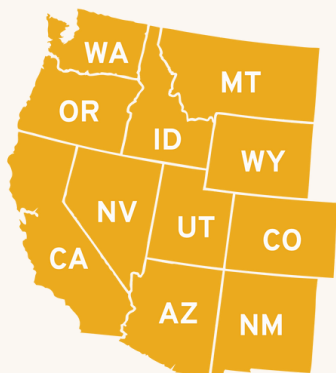
- Gallaudet University
- Western Oregon University
- Rochester Institute of Technology

What This Means

The current staffing market for SLIs is competitive, making staff retention vital for service continuity. Relying on a partner like Sunbelt gives you access to a credentialed pool of interpreters to ensure that your students and family members are supported throughout the school year.

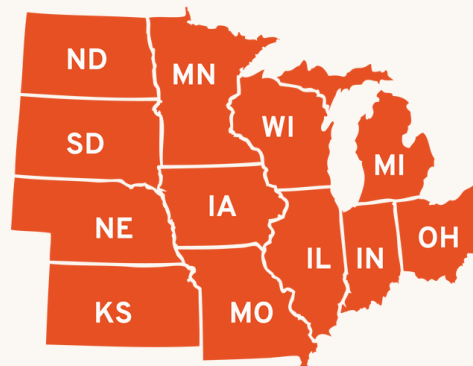
Regional Market Breakdown

West Division



- Current Employment: **15,987**
- Active Job Seekers: **514**
- Retiring Soon: **3,306**
- Annual Job Postings: **784**
- Projected Job Growth: **5.6%**

Midwest Division



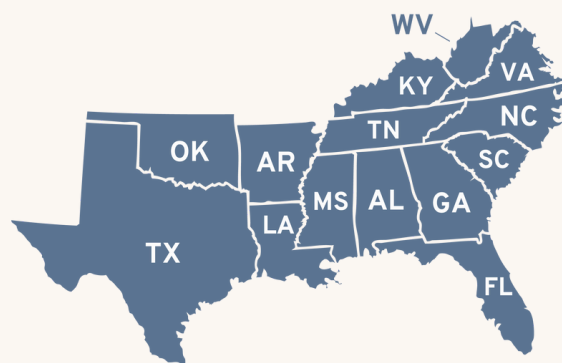
- Current Employment: **11,057**
- Active Job Seekers: **466**
- Retiring Soon: **2,333**
- Annual Job Postings: **599**
- Projected Job Growth: **5%**

Northeast Division



- Current Employment: **10,183**
- Active Job Seekers: **413**
- Retiring Soon: **2,180**
- Annual Job Postings: **523**
- Projected Job Growth: **5.2%**

South Division



- Current Employment: **23,570**
- Active Job Seekers: **848**
- Retiring Soon: **4,687**
- Annual Job Postings: **946**
- Projected Job Growth: **8.4%**

Staffing Insights



SLI shortages are growing quickly in the South region, making strategic staffing partnerships more vital than ever before. Taking proactive measures to build a qualified candidate pool will help prevent serious student accessibility risks and negative impacts on educational equity and compliance.

The West provides the highest compensation and strong hiring demand, increasing recruitment pressure in this region. The South offers the highest projected growth but lower compensation, suggesting retention struggles. The Northeast and Midwest regions both have moderate compensation and growth opportunities, balancing important recruitment and retention factors.

Utilizing Sunbelt as Your Staffing Partner

Sunbelt specializes in connecting school districts with qualified SLIs to meet critical staffing needs quickly and effectively. With a credentialed pool of candidates and a commitment to aligning the right interpreter with each district, Sunbelt can help ensure accessible communication for deaf and hard-of-hearing students in schools throughout the country.

To learn more about Sunbelt's services or request help finding an interpreter to fit your district's needs, please visit our **[Request Professionals](#)** page.

BEHAVIOR SPECIALISTS

As school districts continue to respond to increasing student needs for behavior intervention and mental health support, the demand for qualified behavioral health professionals continues to grow. Key roles such as ABA therapists, board board-certified behavior analysts (BCBAs), and registered behavior technicians (RBTs) are the most competitive to staff in today's volatile education market.

Market Overview



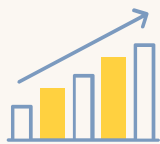
42,090

Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)



36,350

Annual Job Postings



10.9%

Projected Job Growth
(2024-2029)



199,202

Professionals Currently
Employed



32,645

Professionals Retiring
Soon



4,519

Employers Competing

The Graduate Market

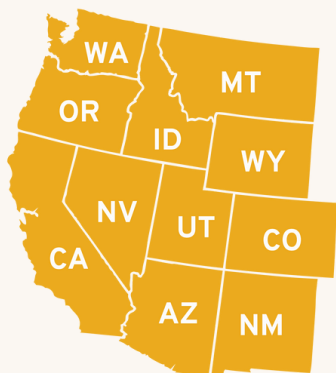
More than 2,000 U.S. Institutions nationwide produce behavior-related graduates annually. The leading schools are Grand Canyon University, the University of Southern California, and Ivy Tech Community College.

What This Means

Although candidate volumes appear solid for RBTs and ABA Therapists, only a portion of these available candidates hold the required licensure or experience to work in school-based settings. BCBAs are difficult to staff, with fewer than 400 job seeker profiles identified nationwide. Districts that rely on traditional hiring methods face prolonged vacancies, service gaps, and compliance risks. Leveraging a staffing partner like Sunbelt helps connect your school district to qualified, credentialed behavioral clinicians across the nation.

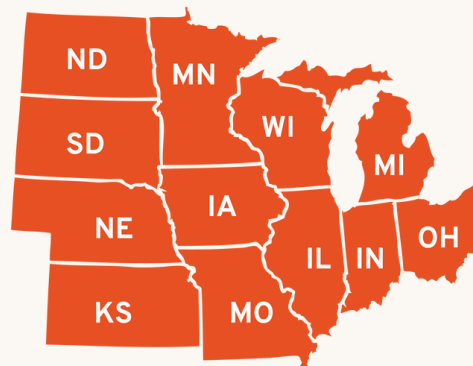
Regional Market Breakdown

West Division



- Current Employment: **65,537**
- Active Job Seekers: **12,285**
- Retiring Soon: **11,869**
- Annual Job Postings: **9,599**
- Projected Job Growth: **13.3%**

Midwest Division



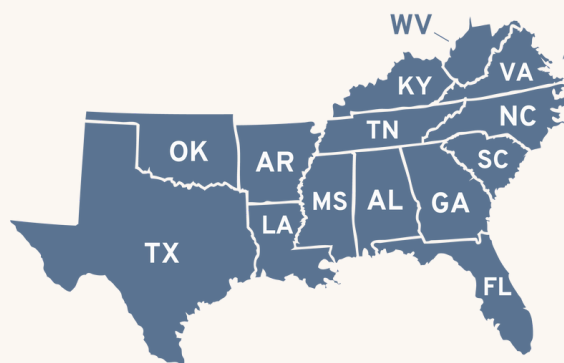
- Current Employment: **40,113**
- Active Job Seekers: **8,510**
- Retiring Soon: **6,367**
- Annual Job Postings: **6,896**
- Projected Job Growth: **9.4%**

Northeast Division



- Current Employment: **29,090**
- Active Job Seekers: **5,932**
- Retiring Soon: **4,821**
- Annual Job Postings: **8,565**
- Projected Job Growth: **11.4%**

South Division



- Current Employment: **64,462**
- Active Job Seekers: **15,363**
- Retiring Soon: **9,588**
- Annual Job Postings: **11,290**
- Projected Job Growth: **12.2%**

Staffing Insights



The Northeast and West regions offer better compensation but limited candidate pools for Behavior Specialist disciplines. This leads to high competition between employers. The South employs significantly more of these specialists but offers comparatively low compensation, which leads to retention difficulties. The Midwest, while having balanced pay and job growth opportunity, still faces candidate scarcity.

Unless school districts implement strategic staffing strategies, critical student behavior services may face disruption due to a lack of available candidates—heightening student support and compliance concerns.

Utilizing Sunbelt as Your Staffing Partner

Sunbelt Staffing assists school districts with finding flexible staffing solutions for behavioral specialist roles including but not limited to the following:

- Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs)
- Registered Behavior Technicians (RBTs)
- Applied Behavior Analysts (ABAs)

We help ensure consistent, compliant coverage that helps you meet student needs. To learn more about Sunbelt's services or request help finding the right professional for your school district, please visit the **[Request Professionals](#)** page.

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

School psychologists are uniquely trained to understand the challenges students face today and apply their expertise to assess, evaluate, and support their individual needs and challenges. What they do is more than a job. It's a passion that requires being fully invested. National data reveals a consistent need for these skilled professionals in a tight labor market, making it challenging for school districts to hire and retain them.

Market Overview



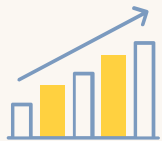
28,720

Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)



51,981

Annual Job Postings



3.8%

Projected Job Growth
(2024-2029)



61,644

Professionals Currently
Employed



About 14,000

Professionals Retiring Soon



1,412

Employers Competing

Leading Graduate Programs for School Psychologists

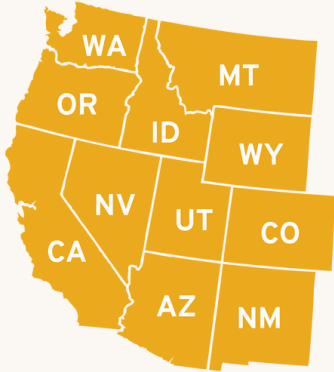
- Southern New Hampshire University
- Liberty University
- Capella University

What This Means

Demand is high for school psychologists. There are more jobs posted annually than job seekers, creating an imbalance in the market. Extended vacancies create delays in student support and compliance risks. Partnering with an agency like Sunbelt gives you access to on-site and teletherapy professionals who can help meet your students' needs.

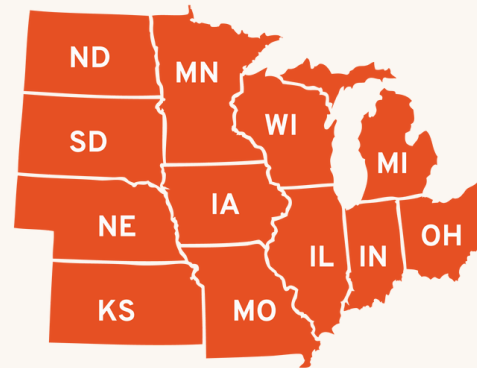
Regional Market Breakdown

West Division



- Current Employment: **15,253**
- Active Job Seekers: **8,044**
- Retiring Soon: **3,327**
- Annual Job Postings: **15,318**
- Projected Job Growth: **5.6%**

Midwest Division



- Current Employment: **12,330**
- Active Job Seekers: **6,430**
- Retiring Soon: **2,880**
- Annual Job Postings: **14,118**
- Projected Job Growth: **2.7%**

Northeast Division



- Current Employment: **15,582**
- Active Job Seekers: **7,640**
- Retiring Soon: **3,778**
- Annual Job Postings: **10,122**
- Projected Job Growth: **3%**

South Division



- Current Employment: **18,479**
- Active Job Seekers: **6,606**
- Retiring Soon: **4,006**
- Annual Job Postings: **12,431**
- Projected Job Growth: **3.7%**

Staffing Insights



There is critical demand for school psychologists, particularly in competitive and growth-intensive markets such as the West. Implementing strategic staffing solutions in these regions helps prevent delayed hiring and addresses gaps in student mental health and special education support.

The West region offers the highest compensation but candidate shortages make hiring difficult. The Midwest has the lowest job growth, making proactive hiring crucial for continued services. While the South has the largest employment pool, moderate compensation increases retention challenges. The Northeast region strikes a balance with high compensation and moderate demand.

Utilizing Sunbelt as Your Staffing Partner

Sunbelt partners with school districts to staff licensed school psychologists. Whether you are looking for on-site or teletherapy providers, we have the hiring capability to ensure that your students' behavioral and mental health needs are met.

To learn more about Sunbelt's services or request school psychology professionals for your school district, please visit our **[Request Professionals](#)** page.

PHYSICAL THERAPISTS

Physical therapy (PT) professionals are essential to strengthening and empowering students with physical disabilities. Their passion for uplifting students and their opportunities is what helps set them apart. As demand continues to rise, finding qualified PT professionals has become a significant challenge nationwide.

Market Overview



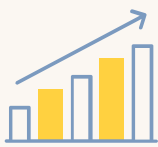
123,290

Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)



268,634

Annual Job Postings



10.1%

Projected Job Growth
(2024-2029)



251,548

Professionals Currently
Employed



About 38,000

PTs Approaching
Retirement Age



7,300

Employers Competing

Leading Graduate Programs for Physical Therapists

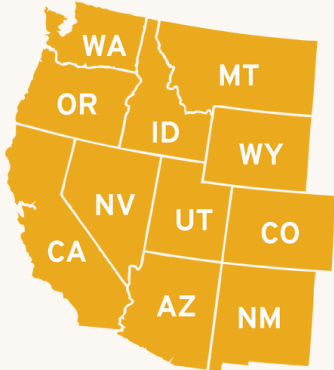
- University of Southern California
- University of Pittsburgh
- Northwestern University

What This Means

With job postings consistently outpacing the number of available PT professionals, there is a significant shortage of qualified candidates. This has created significant staffing challenges for school districts, which are having challenges both recruiting and maintaining PT staffing.

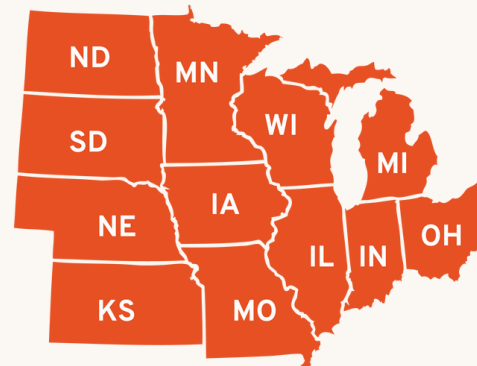
Regional Market Breakdown

West Division



- Current Employment: **62,724**
- Active Job Seekers: **28,155**
- Retiring Soon: **7,415**
- Annual Job Postings: **62,933**
- Projected Job Growth: **13.2%**

Midwest Division



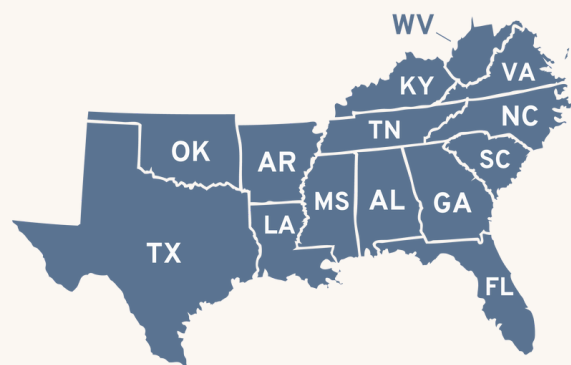
- Current Employment: **57,081**
- Active Job Seekers: **28,792**
- Retiring Soon: **8,605**
- Annual Job Postings: **50,913**
- Projected Job Growth: **7.1%**

Northeast Division



- Current Employment: **43,330**
- Active Job Seekers: **26,132**
- Retiring Soon: **8,810**
- Annual Job Postings: **62,522**
- Projected Job Growth: **8.5%**

South Division



- Current Employment: **88,413**
- Active Job Seekers: **40,211**
- Retiring Soon: **13,318**
- Annual Job Postings: **92,266**
- Projected Job Growth: **11.4%**

Staffing Insights



There is great demand for PT professionals, especially in the West and Northeast, necessitating strategic staffing solutions to ensure the delivery of therapeutic services to students. Without a timely and dependable staffing solution, school districts are at risk of costly disruptions in student care.

The West dominates in compensation, creating a competitive market for employers and heightening recruiting challenges. Similarly, the Northeast offers high compensation, posing intense candidate competition. The South shows many employment opportunities but lower compensation, potentially creating difficulties retaining top talent. The Midwest shows a more balanced market with compensation and growth opportunities.

Utilizing Sunbelt as Your Staffing Partner

Sunbelt has deep experience in matching school districts with highly qualified PT professionals. With dedicated teams in place to help ensure a smooth hiring and onboarding process, and a targeted approach to recruiting top talent, we can help school districts deliver quality physical therapy services to students with minimal disruptions.

To learn more about Sunbelt's services and request help finding PT professionals for your school district, visit our **[Request Professionals](#)** page.

PHYSICAL THERAPY ASSISTANTS

Physical Therapy Assistants (PTAs) are essential in supporting therapy services by working alongside Physical Therapists to deliver therapeutic interventions and enhance student mobility. With demand for these professionals on the rise, sourcing qualified PTAs is essential for effective staffing.

Market Overview

**57,402**Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)**84,126**

Annual Job Postings

**15.6%**Projected Job Growth
(2024-2029)**108,564**Professionals Currently
Employed**About 14,500**PTAs Approaching
Retirement Age**7,979**

Employers Competing

Leading Graduate Programs for PTAs

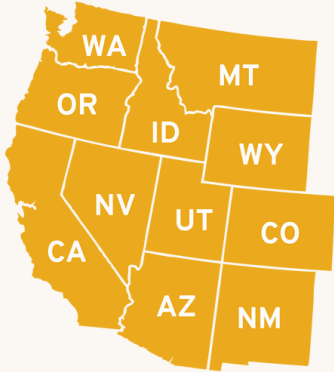
- Keiser University
- Herzing University
- Pima Medical Institute

What This Means

While the workforce appears robust, the ongoing demand continues to outpace the current candidate pool. This makes strategic recruitment efforts essential to maintaining staffing and staying in compliance.

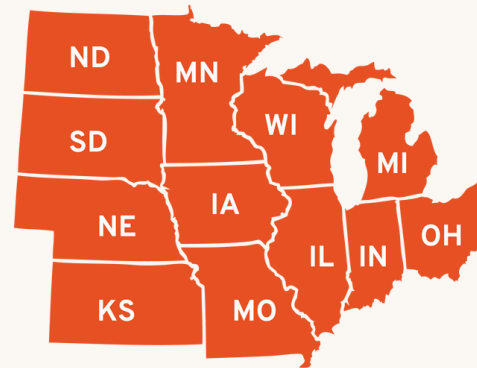
Regional Market Breakdown

West Division



- Current Employment: **18,160**
- Active Job Seekers: **10,983**
- Retiring Soon: **2,262**
- Annual Job Postings: **18,394**
- Projected Job Growth: **19.2%**

Midwest Division



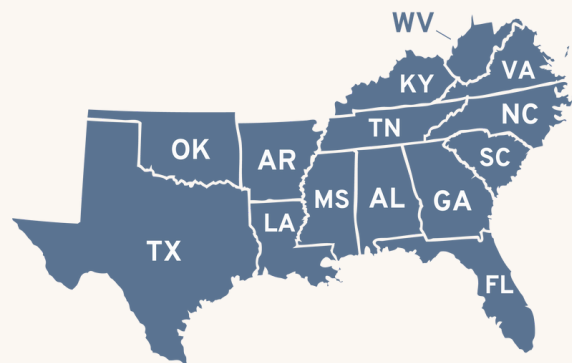
- Current Employment: **26,314**
- Active Job Seekers: **14,603**
- Retiring Soon: **3,562**
- Annual Job Postings: **19,327**
- Projected Job Growth: **11.8%**

Northeast Division



- Current Employment: **14,813**
- Active Job Seekers: **8,305**
- Retiring Soon: **2,275**
- Annual Job Postings: **12,023**
- Projected Job Growth: **18.6%**

South Division



- Current Employment: **49,277**
- Active Job Seekers: **23,511**
- Retiring Soon: **6,483**
- Annual Job Postings: **34,382**
- Projected Job Growth: **15.4%**

Staffing Insights



With the high projected PTA job growth, especially in more competitive markets, schools need to prioritize staffing partnerships for rapid scalability. Failure to address the rising needs and demand for PTAs risks disruptions in therapeutic services.

The West leads in compensation and projected job growth. The South, with the highest employment but lower pay, may face challenges in retaining talent long-term. The Midwest and Northeast both have moderate growth and compensation, signaling a relatively balanced recruiting market.

Utilizing Sunbelt as Your Staffing Partner

Sunbelt works with school districts throughout the United States to deliver staffing solutions for physical therapy assistants. Our team works to streamline the hiring and onboarding process so that your district can focus on delivering uninterrupted therapeutic services to your students.

To learn more about Sunbelt's services or request help hiring physical therapy assistants for your district, please visit our **[Request Professionals](#)** page.

SCHOOL NURSES

A school-based Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) or Registered Nurse (RN) plays an essential role in providing care and health services to students every day. At Sunbelt, we know that making healthcare in schools available and accessible changes lives for the better. The steady demand for these professionals highlights the importance of consistent staffing and its impact on student care.

Market Overview



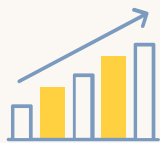
2,112,367

Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)



2,626,929

Annual Job Postings



5.7%

Projected Job Growth
(2024-2029)



3,360,761

Professionals Currently
Employed



843,094

Nurses Approaching
Retirement Age



45,639

Employers Competing

Leading Graduate Programs for School Nurses

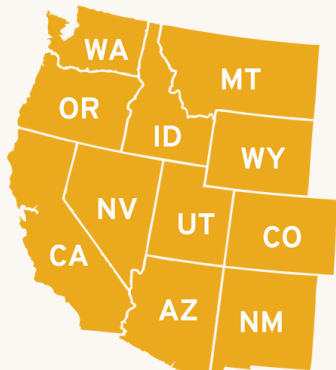
- Western Governors University
- Chamberlain University
- University of Phoenix

What This Means

With the extensive number of job postings and strong competition, there are significant challenges in hiring qualified school nurses. As demand constantly outpaces the available candidates, staffing shortages can lead to significant impacts on student health and school operations. Sunbelt helps address these challenges through targeted recruitment, ensuring that your district can meet the essential healthcare needs of your students.

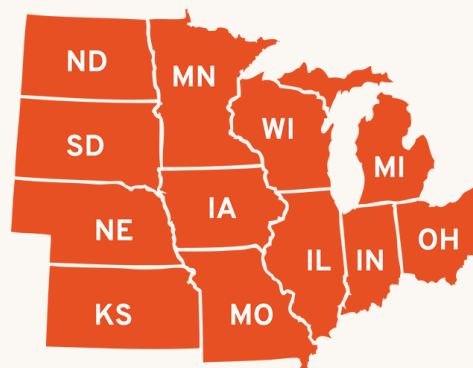
Regional Market Breakdown

West Division



- Current Employment: **667,381**
- Active Job Seekers: **377,846**
- Retiring Soon: **160,736**
- Annual Job Postings: **533,211**
- Projected Job Growth: **8.1%**

Midwest Division



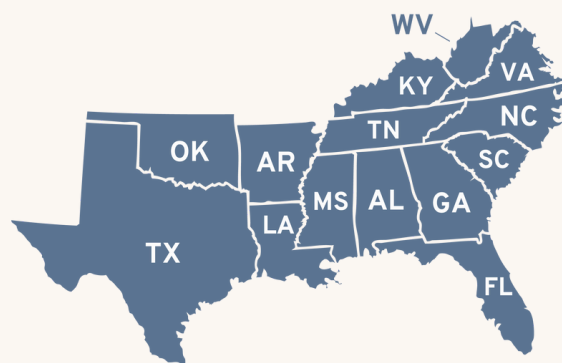
- Current Employment: **783,142**
- Active Job Seekers: **404,014**
- Retiring Soon: **195,611**
- Annual Job Postings: **577,094**
- Projected Job Growth: **2.7%**

Northeast Division



- Current Employment: **643,179**
- Active Job Seekers: **364,362**
- Retiring Soon: **179,316**
- Annual Job Postings: **534,932**
- Projected Job Growth: **5.1%**

South Division



- Current Employment: **1,234,373**
- Active Job Seekers: **694,707**
- Retiring Soon: **299,909**
- Annual Job Postings: **955,710**
- Projected Job Growth: **6.6%**

Staffing Insights



Acute shortages of school nurses in areas with high demand—primarily the South and Northeast—make it critical for school districts to employ strategic staffing strategies to avoid disruptions to student health services.

The West outpaces the other regions notably in compensation, creating high costs for schools to source from the limited talent supply. The South has the most active job seekers and employment volume, but low compensation compared to the national average may make it difficult to retain top talent. Both the Midwest and Northeast have moderate compensation and growth opportunities.

Utilizing Sunbelt as Your Staffing Partner

Sunbelt supports school districts across the United States through efficiently recruiting and placing school nurses, facilitating consistent healthcare support and student wellbeing. By streamlining the hiring process and giving you access to a credentialed pool of candidates, we help shorten the length of vacancies and reduce liability risks.

To learn more about how Sunbelt can help you find qualified nursing staff for your district, please visit our **[Request Professionals](#)** page.

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS

Occupational therapists (OTs) make up an integral part of the support system for students with mental, developmental, and emotional impairments, and empower their participation in daily school activities. As student needs grow, so does the demand for qualified OT professionals to provide services.

Market Overview



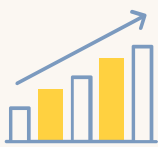
116,948

Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)



130,190

Annual Job Postings



8.7%

Projected Job Growth
(2024-2029)



151,720

Professionals Currently
Employed



Nearly 22,000

OTs Approaching
Retirement Age



6,403

Employers Competing

Leading Graduate Programs for OTs

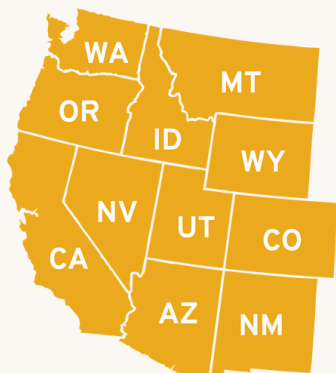
- University of Southern California
- University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences
- New York University

What This Means

The difference between the available job postings and candidates seeking OT jobs underscores the necessity of efficient staffing strategies. Addressing this candidate shortage is vital to continuing high-quality student care and maintaining compliance.

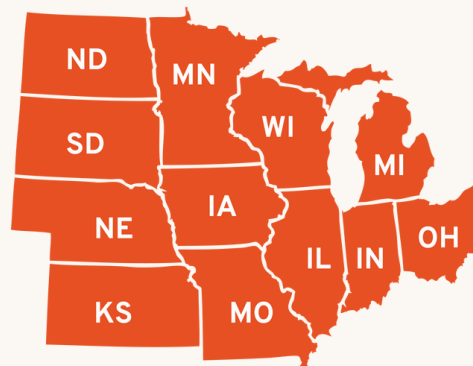
Regional Market Breakdown

West Division



- Current Employment: **27,586**
- Active Job Seekers: **25,172**
- Retiring Soon: **3,681**
- Annual Job Postings: **38,732**
- Projected Job Growth: **12.4%**

Midwest Division



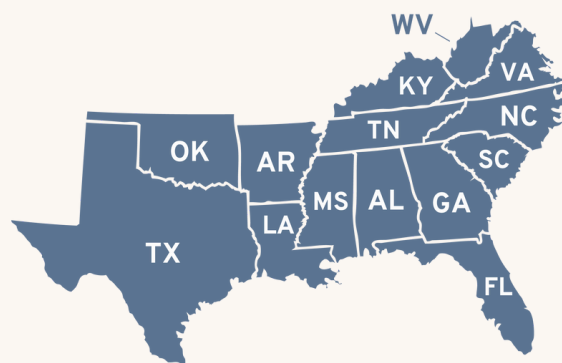
- Current Employment: **37,544**
- Active Job Seekers: **27,941**
- Retiring Soon: **5,334**
- Annual Job Postings: **30,385**
- Projected Job Growth: **5.7%**

Northeast Division



- Current Employment: **35,237**
- Active Job Seekers: **27,038**
- Retiring Soon: **5,660**
- Annual Job Postings: **18,585**
- Projected Job Growth: **7.2%**

South Division



- Current Employment: **51,353**
- Active Job Seekers: **36,797**
- Retiring Soon: **7,151**
- Annual Job Postings: **42,488**
- Projected Job Growth: **10.1%**

Staffing Insights



Urgent shortages in high-demand regions emphasize the importance of proactively utilizing staffing agencies. Without swift hiring actions, districts risk interruptions in occupational therapy services.

The West and Northeast both offer better compensation. Coupled with high growth, this signals heightening recruitment pressures. The South, despite high employment numbers, faces talent retention challenges due to low compensation. The Midwest's balanced pay and job growth shows stable recruiting opportunities.

Utilizing Sunbelt as Your Staffing Partner

Sunbelt helps school districts efficiently hire occupational therapists through streamlined recruiting and onboarding, ensuring professionals can begin delivering services quickly—on-site or remotely. With ongoing clinical support, we promote long-term retention, reducing turnover and easing the burden on administrative and operational teams.

If you are interested in learning how Sunbelt can help connect your school district with a qualified occupational therapist, please visit the **[Request Professionals](#)** page.

CERTIFIED OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSISTANTS

Certified occupational therapy assistants (COTAs) provide vital therapeutic support for occupational therapy teams in both educational and clinical settings. These professionals enhance students' quality of life, yet they are hard to staff as the demand for special services grows.

Market Overview

**13,553**Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)**23,242**

Annual Job Postings

**13.8%**Projected Job Growth
(2024-2029)**47,979**Professionals Currently
Employed**Nearly 8,100**COTAs Approaching
Retirement Age**2,179**

Employers Competing

Leading Graduate Programs for COTAs

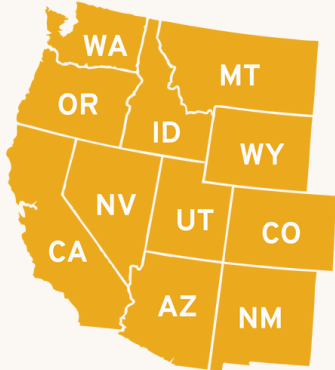
- Keizer University
- Pima Medical Institute
- Herzing University

What This Means

The demand for COTAs consistently exceeds the available job seekers, indicating serious hiring challenges for school districts. Efficient recruitment and retention strategies are critical to addressing these shortages and ensuring continuity in students' therapeutic services.

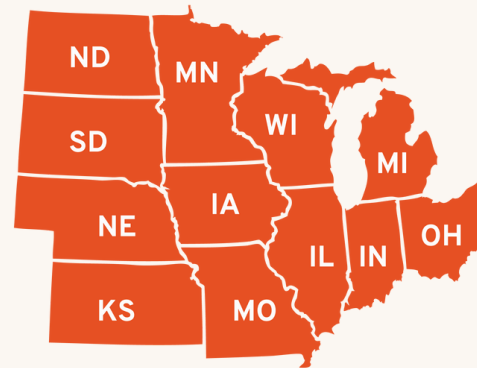
Regional Market Breakdown

West Division



- Current Employment: **7,181**
- Active Job Seekers: **2,066**
- Retiring Soon: **1,108**
- Annual Job Postings: **6,438**
- Projected Job Growth: **19.5%**

Midwest Division



- Current Employment: **12,377**
- Active Job Seekers: **3,420**
- Retiring Soon: **2,054**
- Annual Job Postings: **5,354**
- Projected Job Growth: **10.2%**

Northeast Division



- Current Employment: **8,033**
- Active Job Seekers: **2,879**
- Retiring Soon: **1,657**
- Annual Job Postings: **4,551**
- Projected Job Growth: **12.0%**

South Division



- Current Employment: **20,388**
- Active Job Seekers: **5,188**
- Retiring Soon: **3,276**
- Annual Job Postings: **6,899**
- Projected Job Growth: **14.5%**

Staffing Insights



Rapidly increasing demand for COTAs, especially in competitive markets such as the West and retention-challenged South, emphasizes the urgent need for school districts to be proactive in their staffing strategies. Delaying these solutions can risk disruptions in occupational therapy services to students.

The West has the highest compensation and significant job growth, while the South lags behind in pay despite substantial employment numbers. Both

the Midwest and Northeast present more balanced compensation and job opportunities.

Utilizing Sunbelt as Your Staffing Partner

Sunbelt specializes in recruitment and staffing solutions for certified occupational therapy assistants. We work to ensure that schools can efficiently fill staffing needs and maintain consistent occupational therapy services.

To learn how we can help streamline your search for certified occupational therapy assistants, please visit the **[Request Professionals](#)** page.

5 PROVEN STEPS FOR IDENTIFYING EXCEPTIONAL SPECIAL EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS

Hiring the right professionals means better student outcomes, stronger compliance, and less turnover. Our team uses these five essential steps to help districts identify and secure top talent.

1

Build a Clear Scorecard for the Role

Define success before the first interview. Think about the role's mission, three to five key outcomes expected in the first year, and up to six must-have competencies (e.g., adaptability, student advocacy, collaboration).

2

Research Candidates' Online Presence

Review social media or relevant online contributions to spot alignment (or red flags) with your values.

3

Conduct a 30-Minute Screening Interview

Ask five to seven structured questions to determine their drivers for considering a new role, their fit for the role in question, and their experience with IEPs, diverse learners, etc.

4

Conduct a Top-Grading Interview

Deep dive into their career history. Look for patterns of success, their motivation for working in special education, real examples of problem-solving and student support. Ask how their former employers would describe them.

5


Check References with Four Targeted Questions

In what context did they work with the person? What were the candidate's biggest strengths? What were their biggest areas for improvement back then? What tips do they have for us on how to coach this person?

SUNBELT SUPPORTS ONE OF THE LARGEST SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN FLORIDA WITH 200+ PLACEMENTS

Our Partnership

Since 2011, we've proudly partnered with one of Florida's largest school districts to deliver high-quality special education professionals to serve more than 200,000 students. Over the years, we've made more than 200 placements including nurses, therapists, teachers, and paraprofessionals. While the district works with multiple staffing vendors, Sunbelt has built a trusted relationship with their supervisors and purchasing staff—earning a reputation for our white-glove service and reliability. Our consistent performance has led to expanded responsibilities, including being entrusted with hiring decisions, reflecting the strength and success of our partnership.



Your team is always responsive and invested in helping us plan ahead. It truly feels like a partnership.

Solutions + Impact

Efficient Hiring Process: Internal trainings are given on our client's process and specific credentialing needs, cutting interview and onboarding time in half.

Operational Support: We've developed specialized onboarding and training resources specific to our client for our internal credentialing team, significantly reducing the time required for fingerprinting and compliance.

Client Partnership: Our proactive collaboration with purchasing and department supervisors has improved workforce planning and created a strong sense of partnership.

On-Site Support: Our Florida-based team has gone above and beyond, including on-site visits and face-to-face engagement, reinforcing our commitment to service excellence.

SUNBELT HELPS PARTNER FILL HARD-TO-FIND ROLES FOR CONNECTICUT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Our Client

Our client serves more than 3,500 students across six schools, including two elementary, two middle, and two high schools. Located in Western Connecticut, the district is committed to providing a broad range of educational and support services tailored to student needs, including specialized services for those requiring additional support.

Their Story

Prior to partnering with Sunbelt Staffing, our client was experiencing ongoing staffing challenges with critical roles including nurses, RBTs, and counselors. These roles remained open for extended periods, and the district struggled with high turnover and a shortage of qualified candidates. While they were utilizing both internal recruitment efforts and another staffing agency, results were inconsistent, and urgent positions often went unfilled, impacting student services.

Our Impact

Since beginning our partnership in 2023, Sunbelt Staffing has placed 13 qualified professionals across a range of hard-to-fill roles, including school nurses, registered behavior technicians (RBTs), and counselors. Today, we are proud to serve as the district's primary staffing vendor, delivering value through:

- Faster fill times for critical roles
- Budget-conscious solutions without compromising on candidate quality
- Collaborative support that puts student outcomes first

The district has been so pleased with the performance of our professionals that they have directly hired several of them—a strong testament to the quality and long-term impact of our placements.

Sunbelt Staffing played a key role in helping us fill hard-to-staff roles. Not only did they help us meet these needs quickly, but they also worked with us to find solutions that aligned with our budget. What sets Sunbelt apart is their transparency, reliability, and genuine interest in building a friendly collaborative partnership.

OVERVIEW OF SUNBELT STAFFING

Sunbelt Staffing has been partnering with school districts across the United States since 1989 to provide highly qualified professionals so you can do what you do best—educate happy, healthy students. Our mission has always been to utilize our unmatched knowledge, unwavering commitment, and unrivaled determination to advocate for and empower your students.



Unmatched Special Education Staffing Expertise

We've been doing what we do for more than 30 years, so we understand what you do and what kinds of specialists you need.



Highly Qualified Candidates

We only work with highly qualified, credentialed professionals while managing all contract and benefits details on your behalf. Essentially, we do what we do best, so you can focus on doing what you do best.



Nationwide Reach

Whether you're in an inner city, a rural community, or somewhere in between, we'll make sure you get the best specialists for your needs.



Personnel Management and Support

We will screen, coordinate communications, schedule interviews, and manage the onboarding and credentialing for the candidate of your choice. Our screening includes license verification, drug testing, background checks, and detailed reference checks.

"Sunbelt is an extremely professional organization and has helped us fill our critical needs by providing a high-quality special education staffing service to our school district."

-School Staffing Coordinator

CONTACT US

Strengthening your team with the right talent partner can have a profound impact on the students, the families, and the communities you serve. After all, better education professionals produce better student outcomes. By partnering with us, you can feel confident that you're getting access to the country's highest quality credentialed candidates.



[800-659-1522](tel:800-659-1522)



info@sunbeltstaffing.com



sunbeltstaffing.com



Request Professionals today and learn how Sunbelt can help you see education staffing in a whole new light.