

Keep up with paperwork

If you teach special education, you have major responsibilities in addition to instructing your students. You are required by the federal and state governments, and often your local district, to document your work to ensure procedural safeguards for students with disabilities. This mandatory paperwork is an increasing part of special educators' workload.

No matter how good of a teacher you are, there are legal consequences for failing to complete paperwork, and you risk losing your job if you fall too far behind. It is important to get yourself organized, take advantage of any support your school can provide and ask for help when you need it.

- **Get a mentor and use his or her expertise.** If your school does not provide formal mentoring, find an experienced colleague you can call on for advice. Also keep the lines of communication open with your fellow teachers.
- **When you attend IEP meetings, come prepared** with a checklist of things to get done – both general goals and items specific to that student.
- **Use systems to keep track of deadlines and students.** Most districts use an electronic data management system for special education. If yours doesn't, develop your own spreadsheets. Use one spreadsheet for due dates for IEPs, periodic reviews and assessments; if you have case management responsibilities, use another spreadsheet to track students' whereabouts and progress. Color-coding the spreadsheet entries can be helpful.
- **Tell someone if you are getting overwhelmed with paperwork.** Go to your mentor or a colleague first, and then a supervisor or principal, or the special education coordinator or director. Ask for time and support to get your work done. Do not wait until you are so far behind you're in danger of losing your job.
- **Ask if clerical help is available.** Depending on the school district, you might be able to get help processing the paperwork. It is your responsibility, however, to get the work done. Work with your local union negotiators to address issues related to special education through the collective bargaining agreement.
- **Caseload limits.** Minnesota rules now require districts to have a policy on caseload limits for teachers of students receiving special education services 60 percent or less of the instructional day. Education Minnesota recommends that local unions provide input from affected special educators in the development and implementation of these policies.
- **Want more tips?** Visit: <http://www.nea.org/tools/advice-for-new-special-education-teachers.html>. The Minnesota Department of Education also has a mentoring program for new special educators. Contact Becca Jackson at rebecca.jackson@state.mn.us or 651-582-8409 for more information.

Stay in compliance

What can you do to overcome monitoring and compliance issues? Document, involve parents, correctly identify students, make decisions based on student needs, meet timelines as required by law, provide individualized instruction and retain evidence of progress.

