

SPeNSE Fact Sheet



Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education
www.spense.org

Paperwork in Special Education

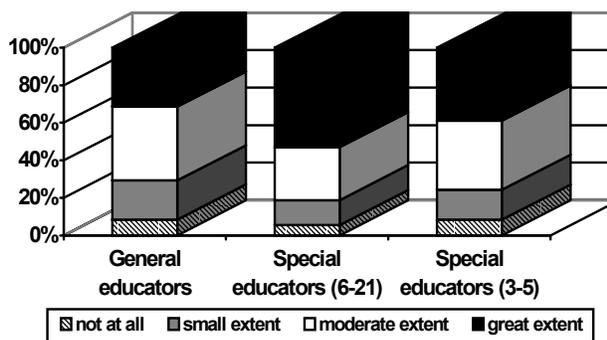
Special education teachers often cite “required forms and administrative paperwork” as an area of dissatisfaction with their working conditions. Because the United States is trying to raise students’ academic performance and address a teacher shortage, any conditions that contribute to teacher attrition and interfere with teachers’ ability to devote their time, attention, and talent to meeting the instructional needs of their students cause increased concern.

How much time do special educators spend on paperwork?

The typical special education teacher spends 5 hours per week completing forms and doing administrative paperwork. Special educators spend more time on paperwork than grading papers, communicating with parents, sharing expertise with colleagues, supervising paraprofessionals, and attending IEP meetings combined. They spend as much time doing paperwork as they do preparing for lessons.

Perhaps even more important, 53 percent of elementary and secondary special education teachers report that routine duties and paperwork interfere with their job of teaching to a great extent. Only 39 percent of preschool special education teachers report that paperwork interferes to a great extent; however, these teachers report spending almost 6 hours per week on paperwork. Preschool special education teachers who report that paperwork did not interfere at all average 2 hours per week on paperwork. Elementary and secondary teachers who said routine duties and paperwork did not interfere at all with their job of teaching or interfered to a small extent spent an average of 3 hours per week on paperwork, so the difference between 3 and 5 hours seems to be an important one.

Percent of teachers who feel routine duties and paperwork interfere with teaching



Is paperwork a special education issue or an issue for all teachers?

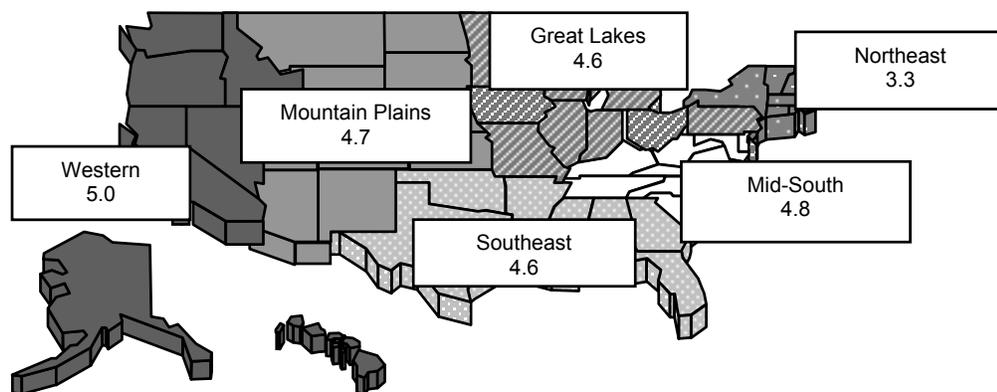
General educators spend considerably less time than special educators completing forms and administrative paperwork—2 hours per week compared to 5—and this is no higher for those who have students with disabilities in their classes. However, general educators

spend 2 hours more per week than special educators grading papers. Furthermore, general education teachers are significantly different from special education teachers in the extent to which they feel routine duties and paperwork interfere with their job of teaching. General education teachers may think of grading papers as part of their instruction, so they may perceive it as contributing to their teaching rather than interfering with it.

Does paperwork vary from place to place?

Hours spent on paperwork varies by district size and geographic region. Preschool special education teachers in small districts spend 3 fewer hours on paperwork each week than their colleagues in large districts. Elementary and secondary special education teachers in small districts also spend slightly less time than their colleagues in very large districts. All special education teachers in the Northeast spend less time on paperwork than teachers in any other region of the country, 3.3 hours a week.

Median number of hours special education teachers (for students ages 3-21) spend per week on paperwork by region



Is paperwork a problem?

Paperwork may be problem for some teachers and not for others. Fourteen percent of special educators spend an hour or less per week completing forms and administrative paperwork. Another 24 percent spend 1.5 to 3 hours. At the other extreme, 8 percent of teachers spend more than 14 hours on paperwork a week.

It is interesting to note that, after controlling for many other working conditions, paperwork emerged as significant in the manageability of special education teachers' jobs and their intent to stay in the profession. Intent to stay was also linked to age, school climate, and the perceived manageability of their jobs.

SPeNSE, which was sponsored by OSEP and conducted by Westat, included telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of local administrators, special and general education teachers, speech-language pathologists, and paraprofessionals in spring and fall 2000. For more information, see www.spense.org.

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