

Summary of a Recent Study: Special Education Teacher and Paper Work Demands.

Mehrenberg, Richard L. (2013). Red Tape and Green Teachers: The Impact of Paperwork on Novice Special Education Teachers. International Journal of Special Education, v28 n1 p80-87 2013.

Background: Special education teachers (SET) often view professional paperwork in a negative light. Their most common complaints are that it is time consuming and that it has limited perceived value. It is estimated that the average special education teacher spends five hours per week in paperwork.¹ SET have described paperwork as wasteful, repetitive and redundant with limited direct impact on daily instructions.² Problems with paper work can negatively impact the productivity, job satisfaction, and motivation of SETs. The study examined if and how these problems intensified for novice special education teachers.

Participants: The study consisted of semi-structured telephone interviews with 18 novice teachers. Teachers resided in 12 different states, taught students with nine distinct type's disabilities, and provided pre-school to vocational transitions services.

Research Questions: To what degree do novice special education teacher value professional paperwork? How do novice special education teachers' best learn to successfully complete professional paperwork?

Findings: a) Many teachers described professional paperwork as redundant, lengthy and overwhelming; and b) participants were generally negative in regards to the extent of preparation their pre-service program provided them about paperwork. In addition, for many, the most beneficial training took place on the job. Finally, others felt that training and experience in a previous career best helped prepare them for special education red tape.

Observations: Researchers observed that the findings reinforced prior research that found special education paperwork to be a stressful and tedious task. Results suggest that educators are happier and more satisfied when they regularly are engaged in tasks directly associate with helping children learn. It is critical that the field invest in on-going training, guidance, and communication to best support new teachers and provide students with the quality education they deserve.

¹ Suran & Giangreco, 2009).

² Kirling et al. 2004