

2019 Legislative Session Issue Brief

Special education

Minnesota needs to ensure our most vulnerable students get the extra attention they need in school to be successful. It is imperative special education teachers are allowed to spend the majority of their time doing what's important—teaching.

While the number of special education students in Minnesota has increased over the past two decades, it's getting harder and harder for schools to find licensed special education teachers. School hiring officials predict that in the next five years the most difficult staff to hire will be special education teachers, according to the 2017 Minnesota Department of Education's Teacher Supply and Demand report. For example, Rochester Public Schools has more than 30 vacancies for special education teachers and paraprofessionals this school year.

This severe shortage in special education teachers can be traced to redundant and overwhelming amounts of paperwork, large caseloads and the lack of quality professional development.


Special educators feel they are deprived of enough instructional time because of their redundant and burdensome paperwork requirements. Minnesota requires more paperwork than the federal government, and these extra reports and forms do not change the actual services offered to students. A survey of more than 900 special education teachers and paraprofessionals found 98.4 percent were “moderately to extremely frustrated” with paperwork and almost 80 percent stated the most aggravating part of the paperwork is that it takes time away from their students. Twenty percent of the educators said they spend more than nine hours per week outside the classroom doing paperwork.

Many paraprofessionals are also not receiving continuous, professional development relevant to special education. Minnesota statutes require school districts to provide annual training for paraprofessionals to continue to develop knowledge about how their students' disabilities affect behavior and learning. However, the state has not dedicated funding for this training. That means many districts do not set aside sufficient time or resources to provide this training. Education Minnesota supports:

- Requiring the state to fund its portion of special education costs instead of relying on school districts to pay for them. The special education cross subsidy costs school districts \$800 million a year.
- Reducing local district paperwork requirements and caseloads for our special education educators.
- Reinstating statutory language and funding for the online reporting system which would more effectively and efficiently collect special education data and result in special educators having more time to spend with their students.
- Funding for 16 hours mandatory paid training for all paraprofessionals who work directly with students prior to the beginning of each school year.

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www.educationminnesota.org

Education Minnesota is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association and AFL-CIO. 



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