

Speech to the Senate

Good afternoon. I am honored to have been asked to speak to you about a concern that is weighing on the hearts and minds of many special education teachers in Moorhead: prep time and how it is being used.

Special education teachers spend a majority if not all of their prep time on paperwork, specifically evaluations and IEP's. In order to be compliant there are deadlines attached to these legal documents. An evaluation alone can take up to 10 hours from start to finish. Multiply that by a caseload of 17 and you realize just how much time is involved. Depending on the district you may be required to complete additional paperwork such as special education bussing forms, para request forms, and extended school year forms, all of which take time. This leaves little or no time within the contract day to plan/prep the specialized/individualized instruction that each student is entitled to based on their IEP.

It is no surprise to anyone the lack of special education teachers we have in Minnesota. In place of licensed special education teachers districts are hiring teachers on a variance. While this helps reduce caseloads it does not help reduce paperwork or planning. Non-licensed special education teachers cannot complete evaluations or conduct assessments. Many of them do not know how to differentiate instruction, create and carry out behavior plans or even set up a special education classroom to allow for student success. Simply put they have not received the specific training it takes to be a special education teacher. In the end, the burden falls back on licensed teachers with no additional time in their day. Special education teachers need an additional prep time built into their schedule. One prep time for paperwork and one prep time for planning.

I want to thank you for listening to my concerns. This is my 25th year as a special education teacher and I can honestly say the last few years have been the most challenging. Caseloads have increased, students behaviors have increased, paperwork has increased and prep time has stayed the same. Teachers are tired of putting in time outside of their contract in order to get everything done in a day. We are at risk of losing some very important staff members: Special Education Teachers. I urge you to think about what I have shared and plead with you to help make the needed changes in our school districts.

