GCED Policy 50 Caseload Size in Special Education Policy

Adopted: 12/4/08
Revised: 11/2/17

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to the staff of Goodhue County Education District and its member district for caseload size determinations in special education programs. Using and applying this information should result in the following:

- A consistent method and procedure in determining special education caseload size across all schools.
- Threshold ranges on when to request additional special education personnel.
- A common understanding of the legal requirements for ensuring a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to all children with disabilities.
- Maintaining the integrity of the IEP [Individualized Education Program] process in making service and eligibility decisions on an individual basis.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendment of 2004 has no provision governing special education caseloads or class size. All such requirements are determined under State laws or policy. MN Rule 3525.2340, Subpart 4(b) requires districts to adopt a policy to determine caseloads for any areas not already addressed in law. Schools provide services for students with disabilities through special education teachers and a variety of related service providers such as occupational therapists and physical therapists, psychologists, speech and language therapists, and school nurses.

BEST PRACTICE

Recent research provides clear empirical direction for States and schools in setting consistent caseload policies (Russ and Chiang, 2001). It is important that a "school system" set clear direction on acceptable caseload size instead of each school setting their own standard. The variable that makes this difficult is that each student is unique and different. Teacher "A" could have 12 students with disabilities with a variety of learning and behavior disabilities—the caseload is manageable and all students are progressing on their IEP goals. Teacher "B," on the other hand, might have six students and because of the severity and unique needs, requires the assistance of a paraprofessional.

2. Policy and Procedures Guidance on Caseload Size

It is difficult to set a certain caseload size (one size fits all) as a standard that would be appropriate for all situations. The individual and unique needs of each student with a disability are key variables. The school principal and special education leadership should always be consulted before any decision is made that would require the addition of a new teacher, paraprofessional, or related service staff. The following are general guidelines to follow:

- *Individualized Education Program*—The IEP Team makes important decisions that impact the size of a special education staff. Please make sure the factors listed below have been addressed before any IEP service decision is made:
  - Does the school offer and implement services under Section 504 and other school-wide programs such as Title I?
  - Did the school use their Student Assistance Team (pre-referral) before the student was recommended for an evaluation for special education?
  - Does the school staff understand the concept of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)?
  - Does the IEP start with the general education classroom as the appropriate educational setting for the student? The student should be educated in the general classroom to the fullest extent possible with support and services from special education.

- Is the school principal actively involved in the IEP process and attends all IEP meetings? The building administrator commits the resources of the school during the IEP process.

- Does the school staff understand the concept of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)? The IEP services do not need to be the best or most expensive, but they should address the unique education needs of the student.

• *Recommended Special Education Caseloads*—Listed below are suggested caseloads for special education staff. Again, these are areas that state law does not specifically address. If your school begins to exceed the range, the school principal and special education leadership should meet to discuss the situation to ensure that proper evaluation, eligibility, and placement procedures are being followed.

- Elementary Grades K–5 for Resource Services and PreK-5 for all others

    - **Resource Services**: mild/moderate; spends 60 percent or more in general education—Caseload range 14–18

    - **Occupational/Physical Therapist**—Caseload range 1–60
      Less than 20 = .25 FTE 20-30 = .5 FTE 30-60 = 1 FTE

    - **Speech and Language Pathologist**—Caseload range 1–60
      Less than 20 = .25 FTE 20-30 = .5 FTE 30-60 = 1 FTE

    - **Paraprofessional**—One paraprofessional per 10 students in a resource room setting; one paraprofessional per 6 in self-contained programs.

- Middle School Grades 6–8

    - **Resource Services**: mild/moderate; spends 60 percent or more in general education—Caseload range 16–20

    - **Occupational/Physical Therapist** —Caseload range 1–60
      Less than 20 = .25 FTE 20-30 = .5 FTE 30-60 = 1 FTE

    - **Speech and Language Pathologist**—Caseload range 1–60
      Less than 20 = .25 FTE 20-30 = .5 FTE 30-60 = 1 FTE

    - **Paraprofessional** —One paraprofessional per 10 students in a resource room setting; one paraprofessional per 6 in self-contained programs.

- High School Grades 9–12

    - **Resource Services**: mild/moderate; spends 60 percent or more in general education—Caseload range 17–21

    - **Occupational/Physical Therapist** —Caseload range 1–60
      Less than 20 = .25 FTE 20-30 = .5 FTE 30-60 = 1 FTE

    - **Speech and Language Pathologist**—Caseload range 1–60
      Less than 20 = .25 FTE 20-30 = .5 FTE 30-60 = 1 FTE

    - **Paraprofessional**—One paraprofessional per 10 students in a resource room setting; one paraprofessional per 6 in self-contained programs.

If the school exceeds the caseload range on any category and requests additional special education staff, including one-on-one paraprofessional, the school must submit justification to the Special Education Director for approval, using the Request for Additional Staff – Special Education, attached. The Special Education Director will receive the request for

additional staff and will work with the Superintendent and Building Administrator to determine needs. The addition of staff must be approved at the School Board level.

Request for Additional Staff
Special Education

Please complete the following information and submit to the Special Education Director. Do not mention of names of individual students.

School_____Date_____
District_____

A. Describe the current special education caseload and staff.

B. What factors caused the school to exceed recommended caseload numbers?

C. What is the school requesting?

D. Estimated cost $_____

School Principal Signature_____ Date: _____

Special Education Coordinator: _____ Date: _____
Recommended Actions:

Director of Special Education Signature_____ _____

Approved Date _____ Not Approved Date_____

PARAPROFESSIONAL WORK PLAN REQUEST

Student's Name_____ Grade_____ School_____
Case Manager _____Date_____
Disability Area_____IEP Date_____Assessment Date_____

Document the need for a paraprofessional by answering the following questions:

What can the student do independently?

What specific task(s) does the student need help with?

What accommodations can be made to assist the student in being independent?

What interventions or program changes have you tried (e.g., cooperative learning, behavior management plan, regrouping within the classroom, pairing with other students)?

Is there already someone in the building that can provide the services noted above (e.g., another paraprofessional, a student)? Please describe why or why not.

a. What time during the day will the student not require assistance?

b. What time of day will the student require assistance?

Identify which student goal(s) from IEP will require a paraprofessional in order to be attained.

Goal # _____Describe: _____

_____

Goal # _____Describe: _____

_____

Goal # _____Describe: _____

_____

Identify the goal(s) and describe the opportunities for the student to practice the goals independently without paraprofessional help.

Goal # _____Describe: _____

_____

Goal # _____Describe: _____

_____

Goal # _____Describe: _____

_____

Describe the plan(s) for decreasing and reviewing the use of a paraprofessional and include target dates.

Describe the plan for training the paraprofessional in helping the student to establish independence.

Two student observations are required. Persons responsible: 1._____

(See attached observation forms) 2._____

Team conclusion: _____

_____

Team members: _____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Target date for reviewing need for paraprofessional support: _____

Who will be responsible to coordinate paraprofessional training? _____

Who will be responsible for directing the work of the paraprofessional? _____

Approved by: *(Signature)*

Special Education Coordinator _____

Principal/Superintendent _____