



Special Education Collective

Agenda



NDU-SEC Background

NDU-SEC Retention Rubric

HB 1530 Development

Initial Survey

HB 1530 Rubric Survey

Background



NDU Special Education Collective Development

- Recognized need due to high volume of reported issues
- Developing a deeper understanding of the issues
- Development of the NDU-SEC Retention Rubric

NDU-SEC Retention Rubric Development

- Key Domains
- Rating scale

HB 1530 Development

- Connecting with Representative Mary Schneider
- NDU-SEC approved sharing the Retention Rubric
- HB 1530 developed based on the Retention Rubric
- NDU-SEC members reviewed and approved 1530



NDU-SEC Survey One



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- 71% report their workload has increased since they began working in special education
 - 86% report they currently feel overwhelmed by their special education workload
 - 44% report they are considering leaving special education
 - 56% report their mental health is adversely affected by their current role in special education

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- 63% of respondents who are responsible for supervising and training paraprofessionals report that they do not have the time or tools to adequately do so
 - 78% report that the shortage of paraprofessionals adds stress to their jobs
 - 59% report they are unable to take their duty-free lunch 3 or more days a week

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- 74% report they are unable to utilize their scheduled prep time 3 or more days a week
 - 85% report they know colleagues who have left special education
 - 83% report their district is having difficulty filling special education positions
 - 81% report that caseloads are a significant factor in the shortage of special education teachers

NDU-SEC Retention Rubric Survey



NDU-SEC Retention Rubric Survey

- Surveyed SPED staff from Oct 2025-Jan 2026 from across the state
- 154 Responses

- 115 K-12 SPED Teachers
- 18 Speech Language Pathologists (SLP's)
- 7 Other
- 6 Early Childhood SPED Teachers

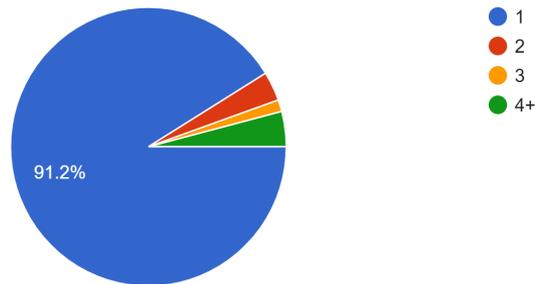
What is your current assignment? Choose the assignment that you have for the majority of the school day.

154 responses



In your current role, how many different school districts do you serve

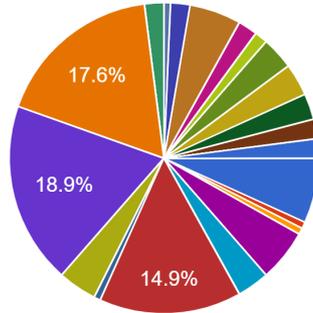
147 responses



134 Teachers serve 1 School District
 5 Teachers serve 2 School Districts
 2 Teachers serve 3 School Districts
 6 Teachers serve 4+ School Districts

What special education unit do you work for?

148 responses



- Bismarck Special Education Unit
- Burleigh County Special Education Unit
- Central Region Special Education Unit
- Dickinson Special Education Unit
- East Central Special Education Unit
- Fargo Special Education Unit
- Fort Totten Special Education Unit
- Fort Yates Special Education Unit

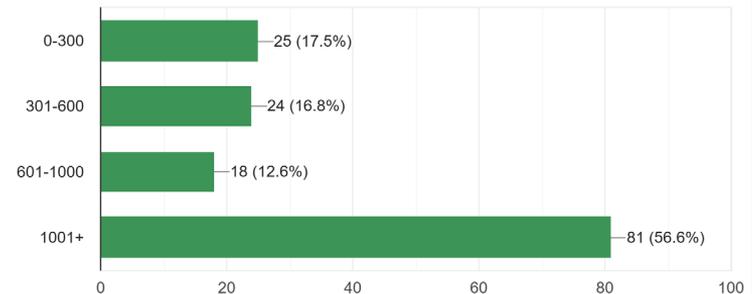
▲ 1/4 ▼

Survey responses included significant participation from **small and rural districts.**

- **45.4% of respondents were from districts with less than 1000 students**

What is the enrollment of the district(s) you serve? Select all that apply

143 responses



Survey Evaluated the 4 domains from the SPED Collective Retention Rubric

- Domain 1: Paperwork Requirements & Supports
- Domain 2: Workload
- Domain 3: Student & Staff Safety
- Domain 4: Paraprofessional Management

All questions based on a 1–3 scale, we used the "Helps Retention Column" from the rubric to craft the survey questions and asked if they are:

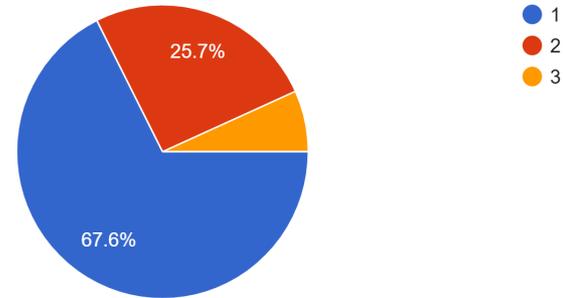
- 1 = Rarely Present
- 2 = Sometimes Present
- 3 = Consistently Present

Domain 1: Paperwork Requirements and Supports

Due Process Paperwork Time

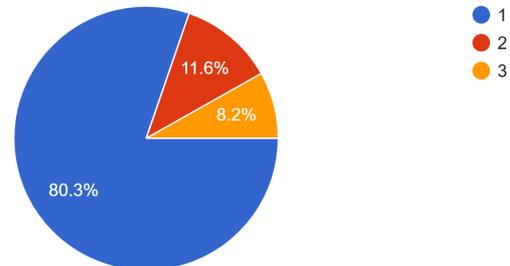
My district provides time during the duty day (outside of prep) for due process paperwork.

148 responses



If IEP/evaluation meetings occur outside the duty day or during prep, I receive compensation or additional support.

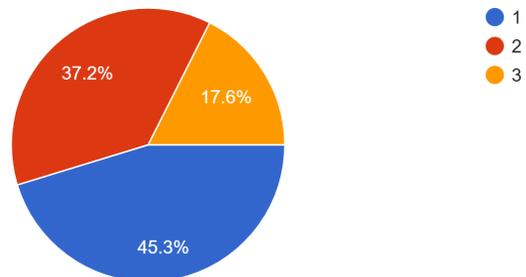
147 responses



Professional Development & Due Process Supports

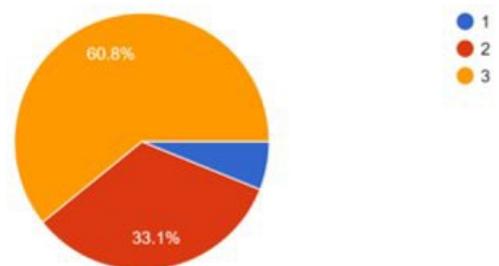
Professional development is available to support due process requirements and paperwork completion.

148 responses



I have access to someone knowledgeable (e.g., facilitator or coordinator) who can answer paperwork questions.

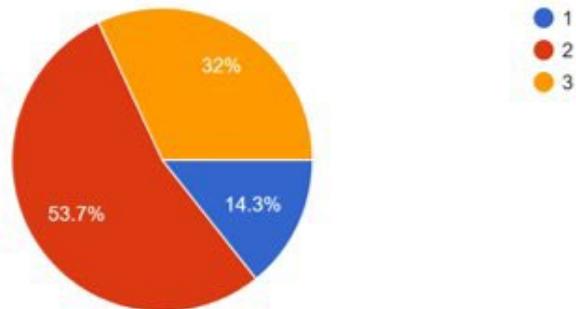
148 responses



Mentoring & Due Process Supports

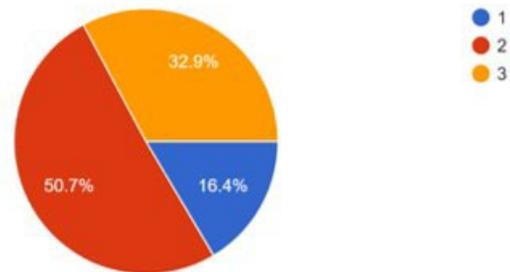
New special educators receive mentoring in due process requirements from experienced educators

147 responses



The culture around due process compliance emphasizes support and guidance more than discipline.

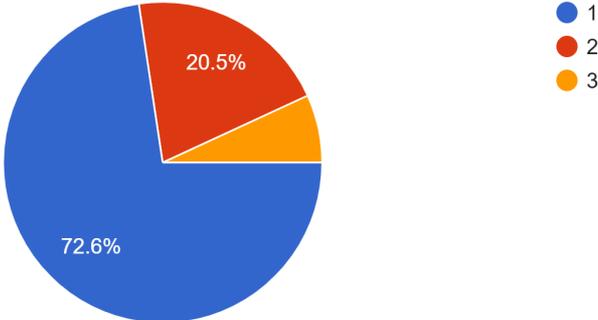
146 responses



Due Process Supports within Negotiated Agreements

Paperwork requirements and supports are addressed in the negotiated agreement.

146 responses



Domain 1: Paperwork Requirements and Supports

Domain Average: 1.803

Common Themes

- No designated paperwork time
- Prep time used for compliance
- Work taken home nights & weekends
- Compensation rarely provided

Respondent Requests

- Dedicated, uninterrupted paperwork time during the contract day
- A separate prep period specifically for IEPs/due process paperwork
- Paperwork days (monthly or weekly)
- Compensation for work completed outside contract hours
- Ability to work from home for paperwork when needed

Respondent Quotes

“Paperwork consumes my life.”

“I can teach or I can case manage but I can’t do both well.”

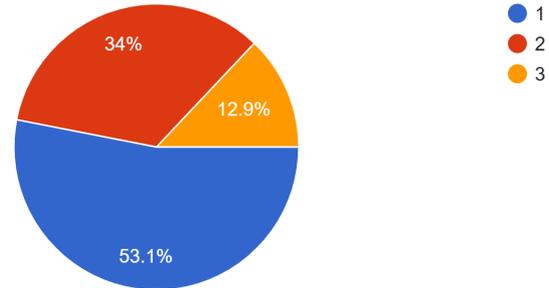
“I truly am really burnt out and feel like I’m constantly attending meetings, doing paperwork, testing students, etc. I don’t feel like I can give every student the time and devotion that I’d like to due to all the extra workload and the increasing caseload and referrals I receive.”

Domain 2: Workload

Caseload Development & Management

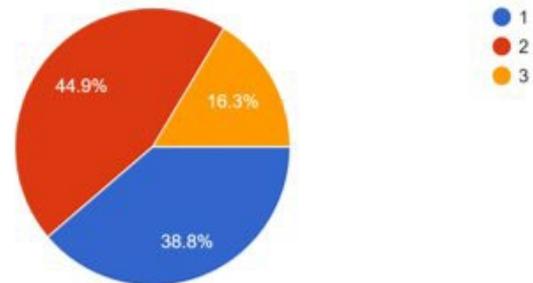
My district uses a clear system, developed with special educator input, for assigning workloads and caseloads.

147 responses



Before changes are made to caseloads, I am included in the review and decision-making process.

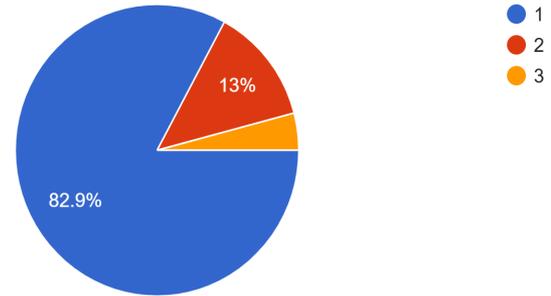
147 responses



Workload Supports

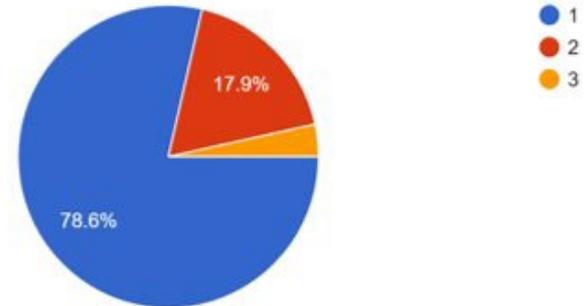
Additional support or compensation is available when workload increases significantly.

146 responses



Workload expectations are described in the negotiated agreement.

145 responses



Domain 2: Workload

Domain Average: 1.460

Common Themes

- Caseloads increasing without adjustments
- Severity not considered (weighted scale concerns)
- No caseload caps
- Strongest teachers assigned hardest cases year over year leading to burnout

Respondent Requests

- Caseload caps
- Weighted caseload systems (based on needs, not just numbers)
- Balanced distribution of high-needs students
- Clear plans when caseloads increase mid-year

Respondent Quotes

“The job requirements are FAR larger than time allows in the day.”

“The job of special education case manager as it currently is in my district is unsustainable. The job requirements are FAR larger than time allows in the day.”

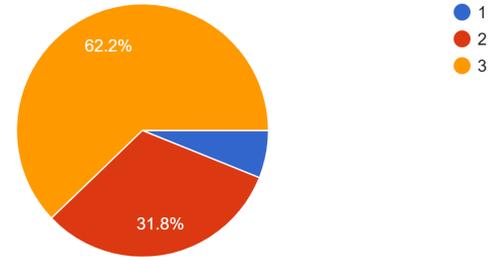
“I love my job. I don't love the time it takes away from my personal time. I spend time outside of school hours grading papers, working on compliance paperwork, lesson planning, collaborating with others, and I'm not compensated for this.”

Domain 3: Student & Staff Safety

Structural Behavior Interventions & Supports

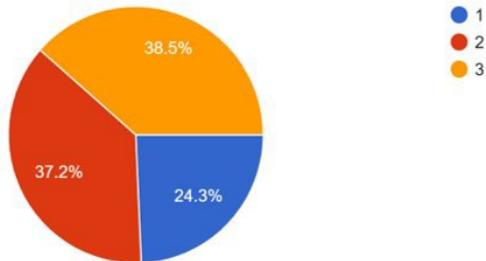
Training and access to district emergency/crisis and lockdown procedures are provided for staff.

148 responses



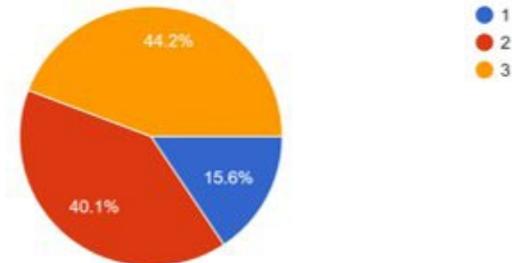
A crisis intervention team exists, with protocols and trained members.

148 responses



Training in de-escalation, protective measures, and restrictive procedures is provided to staff.

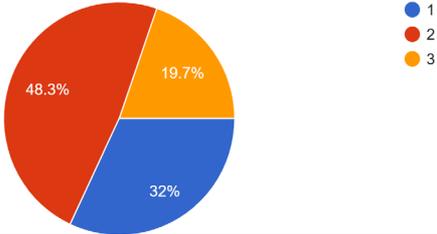
147 responses



Crisis Response & Resources

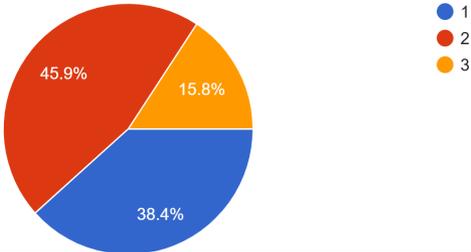
Notification and support are provided when students with a history of violent behavior are placed in an educator's class or caseload.

147 responses



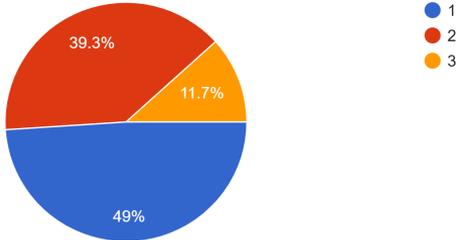
Protective gear and related training are made available to staff when needed.

146 responses



When crisis team members are unavailable, consistent trained staff fill in so services are not disrupted.

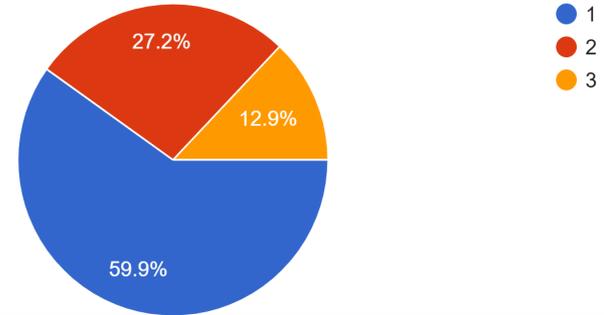
145 responses



Crisis Response Follow Up

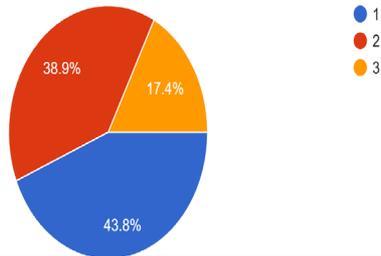
Debriefing, break, or leave options are provided for staff following a crisis.

147 responses



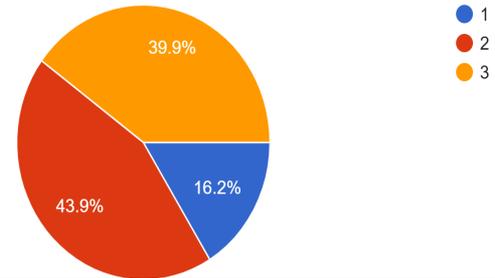
Leave options are available for staff injured during a crisis, without loss of pay or expectation to continue working.

144 responses



Policies on staff injuries are communicated, and staff are expected to document incidents.

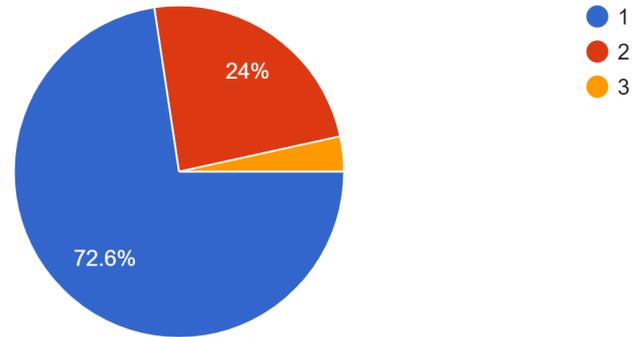
148 responses



Behavior Intervention Plans

Staff have access to time or compensation for planning and implementing behavior intervention plans.

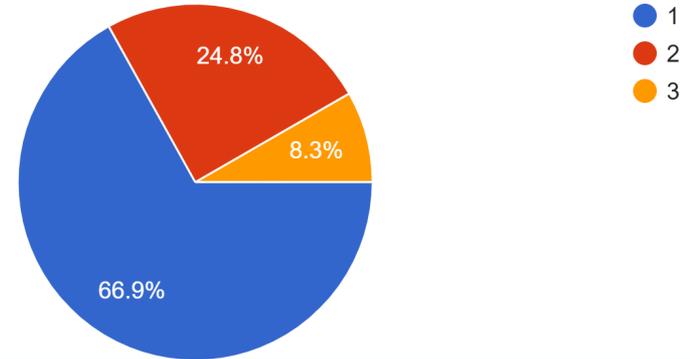
146 responses



Safety & Negotiated Agreement

Student and staff safety is addressed in the negotiated agreement.

145 responses



Domain 3: Student & Staff Safety

Domain Average 1.865

Common Themes

- Stronger crisis response systems
- Clear removal policies for violent/disruptive students
- Behavioral specialists or crisis teams
- More physical space for high-needs students
- Administrative follow-through on consequences
- Schoolwide behavior training
- Staff debriefing and mental health support after crises

Respondent Requests

- Defined placement options for students with extreme behaviors
- Clear “ceiling” for when school setting is no longer appropriate
- Consistent removal procedures when safety is compromised
- Consistent Injury Reporting Method (Statewide)

Respondent Quotes

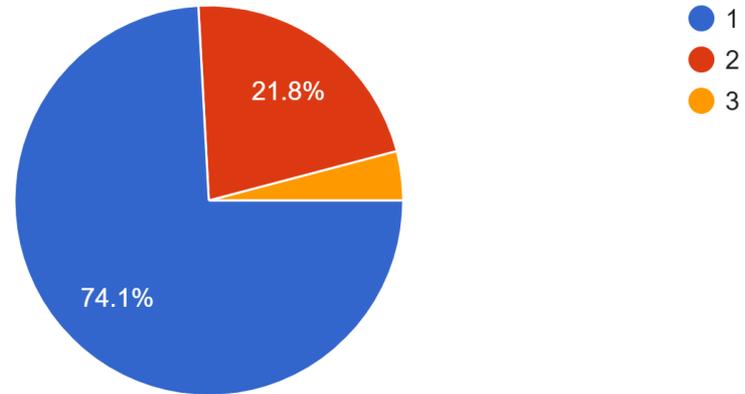
- “At times, it feels that concerns about due process or potential repercussions outweigh staff and student safety.”
- “I don't feel I should have to take personal/sick leave when I am injured by a student, which has happened.”
- “It puts us in a gross position choosing between breaking their IEP with missed minutes and safety of those in the room.”

Domain 4: Paraprofessional Management

Living Wages

Pay and benefits for paraprofessionals keep pace with cost of living.

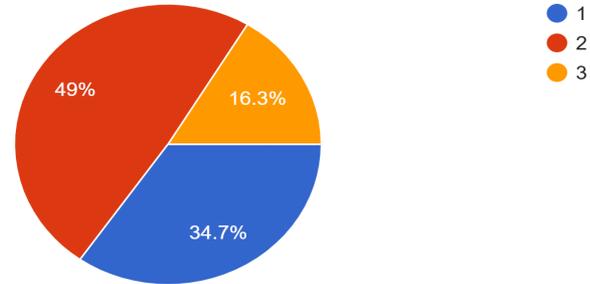
147 responses



Paraprofessional Voice & Supports

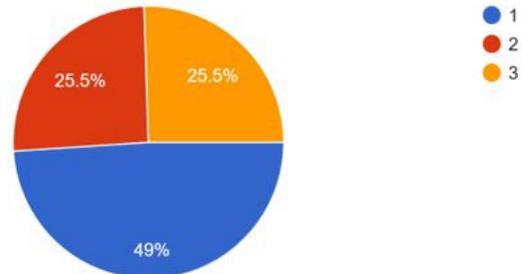
Paraprofessionals are able to provide feedback, and administration addresses it.

147 responses



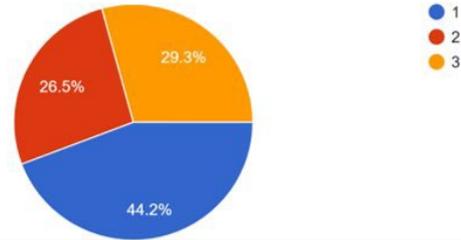
A designated staff member manages paraprofessional schedules and training, with adjusted workload when needed.

145 responses



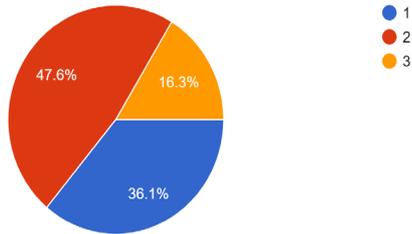
Paraprofessional Management

Annual professional evaluations for paraprofessionals are conducted by administrators.
147 responses



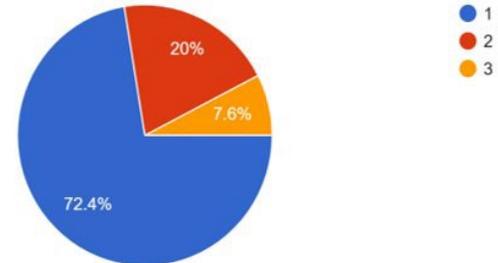
Paid professional development opportunities are available for paraprofessionals without increasing teachers' workload.

147 responses



Paraprofessional management is described in the negotiated agreement.

145 responses



Domain 4: Paraprofessional Management

Domain Average: 1.648

Common Themes

- Insufficient para coverage
- Low pay & lack of benefits affecting retention
- Supervising paras without compensation
- Unsafe conditions when understaffed

Respondent Requests

- District administration provide meet and confer meetings with paraprofessionals at least quarterly and take action based upon the received feedback
- Living wage for paras
- Support with para supervision and evaluation

Respondent Quotes

“I need more help, but help is not available. There really isn’t anything my school district can do about it. Being in a rural school district, there are not enough people willing to work for the peanuts that paras get paid.”

“Paras don't come to work to be physically abused, and they are certainly not paid enough to even feel like it's worth it.”

Key Takeaway

“North Dakota should increase the amount of funding allocated to school districts’ special education departments. Current funding levels make it difficult to maintain appropriate staffing, manageable caseloads, and competitive compensation, which directly impacts sustainability and retention.”

Questions?



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