

# 1

## Getting Organized

**S**pecial education teachers may have a classroom of their own, share space with other special educators, or have a corner in a general education classroom, hallway, or other area. No matter what your situation, you need to be organized—especially if you are a traveling teacher. With the large amount of paperwork and other data for which special education teachers are responsible, having a system that makes sense and keeps important information handy is essential.

### Chapter Outline

---

- Student Information
- Supplies and Materials
- Your Desk and Surrounding Areas
- Forms and Schedules
- Room Arrangement
- Wall Displays

### Student Information

**Do you feel as though you need a secretary to keep yourself organized? Paperwork responsibilities can be overwhelming, and for that reason you need to find a system to help you keep current with your many duties. (Please note that Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 [IDEIA] states that short-term objectives in Individualized Education Programs [IEPs] can be eliminated for all but a small group of students who take alternative**

**assessments on the basis of alternative achievement standards. However, be sure to check with your school district to see whether it plans to implement this directive.)**

- ▶ 1. IEPs are the most important documents you will draft and refer to throughout the year. Keep them in a safe place that is easily accessible to you. IEPs for all of your students should be in place by the first day of school. If you are missing any IEPs, inform your principal or the special education administrator in your school immediately. The IEP cover page provides a great deal of student and family data as well as the all-important IEP due dates. Make certain these dates are accurate, current, and in compliance with your district and state regulations or laws. Goals and objectives should be written based on your district standards. Double-check all IEPs for behavioral issues, transition goals, transportation, and other supplementary aids and related services that are required for the goals. If you have questions or feel you need assistance writing IEPs, ask your special education supervisor or another member of the special education administration staff in your building. IEPs are legal documents for which you are responsible. Be sure they are done correctly.
- ▶ 2. Having easy access to necessary student information is very important. If you are teaching students under the age of majority, be sure to have the names of family members or a guardian who has the legal right to make school and health care decisions for the student. Include current home address, home and work phone numbers, and the times when the person can be reached at these numbers. Record the name of another person who can be called in case of emergency. In addition, know the correct last names of family members, as they may not be the same as the student's. You may also want to include the student's birth date, ID number, or any other information that might be useful to you when having a phone conversation about the student with a support staff member or supervisor. Store this information in a secure yet easily accessible location. It's also a good idea to lock up these confidential documents whenever you leave the classroom.
- ▶ 3. Behavioral information regarding your students should of course be included in the IEP. Be sure you read and understand the specifics, especially if you are responsible for implementing a formal Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP). A BIP is a individualized and detailed plan of action developed to support the student in learning more appropriate behaviors. (See Chapter 4, Positive Behavioral Supports, and Chapter 7, Legal Issues, for more information.) Behavioral information may include a detailed explanation of what the student has responded to in the past and the type of incentive program that has helped the student to be successful, as well as other positive behavioral supports. You may want to make copies of IEP behavior pages for yourself and any general education teachers or support staff involved with the student. If a formal BIP is in place, each staff member involved should have a copy or have access to it and should understand how the plan will be implemented. In addition, be sure you and any involved general education teachers and support staff are aware of serious behavior issues students might have in order to ensure the safety of other students and adults in the classroom.

- ▶ 4. IEP snapshots are a great way to have necessary student information at your fingertips and to share this important data with your general education colleagues in an easy-to-read format, such as Figure 1.1. The special education administrator in your building or school district may have a form for you to use. If not, you may wish to use the one provided here or create your own.
- ▶ 5. Many students with disabilities have varying degrees of medical needs that teachers should be made aware of. Before you disclose confidential information, however, find out your district policy regarding the distribution of medical and health information. Your school should have on file any essential medical information such as the name of the student's doctor and who (including parent, guardian, and school staff) has permission to administer medication or medical assistance. Some students take medication at home rather than at school, and there may be times when, for whatever reason, they do not get it. You may want to keep a record of this so you can work with the student (if appropriate), parents, or guardians to ensure the medication schedule is followed. Often, school performance is affected by medication or lack thereof. In addition, take note of any side effects that may result from the medication. You will also want to keep on hand any information regarding therapy a student may be receiving outside of school if families have shared this with you and have given you permission to speak with the therapist. You can usually obtain parental permission forms from your school psychologist, social worker, or your administrator. Also note that some students with disabilities may have special classroom needs. Be sure you are aware of these and make arrangements to accommodate them.

## Supplies and Materials

**Sometimes it's a real challenge for special education teachers to obtain supplies. But part of your job is to be a strong advocate for your students' rights to the same education using the same materials as their counterparts in the general education classroom. Keep that in mind if you feel apprehensive about asking for what you and your students need.**

- ▶ 1. As you begin to gather supplies and materials, make sure to get copies of all the current textbooks and teachers' manuals you will need for teaching your students. If you have students at different grade levels, then you will need materials for all the levels. Your administrator should be aware of your needs and supply you with these things. However, this might not always be the case, and you may need to borrow from your colleagues or even make copies of some of the materials. Become familiar with what will be taught from these texts in the general education classroom so that whether you teach students separately in an alternative setting or within the general education classroom, both you and your students with disabilities will always be as up to speed as possible. Be sure to check out the teachers' manuals, as many of them offer suggestions for reteaching and modifying work for students who need extra practice. Some manuals may also include an audio tape of the text that can be used to accommodate students with reading or vision difficulties.

**Figure 1.1** IEP Snapshot

IEP Snapshot for \_\_\_\_\_ Special Ed. Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Present Level of Performance in Academic IEP Goal Areas: \*Behavior Goals/Formal Behavior Plan? Yes  No

Reading \_\_\_\_\_

L/A-Writing \_\_\_\_\_

Math \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Strengths: \_\_\_\_\_

**Supplementary Aids and Services Needed in Regular Education Setting?**

	Frequency/Amount	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Location of Services

**Special Factors**  Behavior  Limited English Proficiency  Communication

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**\*If applicable, please see attached Behavior Intervention Plan or other information re: behavior.**

SOURCE: Adapted from M. Nieves-Harris, M. S., 2004.

- ▶ 2. In addition, seek out any other professionals in your building who can offer assistance with curriculum and teaching strategy information. In some districts, there are content specialists who can offer techniques and strategies as well as materials you can use. This person may even be willing to demonstrate for you or even teach a lesson with you. In addition to content area specialists, most high schools have a department chair for each curricular area. This person can also be a valuable resource for obtaining materials and providing suggestions.
- ▶ 3. Special education teachers often use many different materials to support the learning of their students and are always on the lookout for places to find what they need. Teaching supply stores now offer many items that can be helpful. Some of these include supplementary workbooks in all subject areas that provide additional instruction and practice, teacher resource books that provide suggestions on how to adapt work for students with disabilities, and grade-level content books written at lower reading levels. Highlighting tape, graphic organizer templates, and age-appropriate manipulatives are just a few examples of other useful items. Be sure to see what is available at these stores—and take a paper and pencil along to make some notes. You might be able to create some of these things on your own and save some money in the process. Be sure to keep files of everything you purchase or create yourself because they will be useful through the years.
- ▶ 4. Ideally, students will come to class prepared with necessary materials; however, this may not always be the case. To avoid lost instructional time, keep on hand a supply of pencils, calculators, extra copies of textbooks, and so on for students to use during the class hour. It's also a good idea to have extra lined paper available. Also, be sure you anticipate activities that require additional supplies (science lab materials, dictionaries, and so forth), and have them on hand and organized before your lesson. Valuable learning time will be wasted if you are scrambling for materials while your students wait.
- ▶ 5. Any good behavior management system requires not only planning but supplies as well. No matter what grade level you are teaching, you will probably use some type of consumable incentive. If you know what grade levels you will be teaching in the fall, spend the summer hunting for bargains at drug stores, dollar stores, and garage sales. If you buy a little at a time, the strain on your wallet will be much less. It may even be possible to obtain free certificates for small edible items from fast-food restaurants if you tell them you are a teacher. In addition, you may have a schoolwide incentive program where you teach. Try to incorporate this into your own reward program to stress the importance of following school rules at all times.

## Your Desk and Surrounding Areas

**Is your desk a frightening and mysterious expanse that you are loathe to conquer? Do you fear you've ignored something very important lying at the bottom of the heaps of paper you haven't the courage to explore? An organized desk area is so important—read on for some valuable advice on how to accomplish this.**

## 6 ■ Common-Sense Classroom Management

- ▶ 1. It is important to keep your desk surface area as clean and organized as possible. A busy day often means a messy desk as there is usually little time to organize while you are teaching. Take a few minutes at the end of the day to clear away and put things where they belong. You may want to place things that you need to deal with the next day on the front of your desk. If you can manage to organize at the end of every day, you will feel more prepared when you come in the next morning. Remember that your clean desk can be a model for your students as it sends a message that the teacher is organized.
- ▶ 2. As special education teachers, we have a good deal of paperwork responsibility beyond preparation for teaching. For this reason, finding a system to organize this information is very important. Using baskets, totes, or other compact containers is one good way to do this. Consider designating a shelf for these receptacles or an area on your desk. If you put them on your desk, think about using stackable containers to avoid clutter and to ensure a clear workspace. Listed below are some ways to use your containers and to divide your paperwork so that you are better able to keep things up-to-date. You may think of other ways.
  - a. Things to complete today—for example, IEP invitations, adaptations to assignments, and correspondence
  - b. Instructional materials—for example, worksheets for current lessons for individual students or groups
  - c. Ongoing paperwork—for example, IEPs, behavior plans, and behavioral assessments
  - d. Contact information—for example, student phone numbers, outside agency numbers, and numbers for supervisors
- ▶ 3. Make your desk as functional as possible with classroom-necessary items at your fingertips. Your desktop should hold containers with paper clips, pencils and pens, and so on. Also have available a stapler and staple remover. Find a small basket for scrap paper and sticky notes. Keep additional pencils and pens, staples, tape, and other items in a top drawer that is handy for you. A calendar of some kind is another important item to have on your desk. Write down all importance dates including IEP meetings, conferences, report card due dates, and so on for easy reference. Some teachers like a small calendar that can be carried from classroom to classroom, while others prefer a large monthly calendar big enough to use as a desk pad. Whatever you prefer, don't omit this important item to help you keep abreast of daily, weekly, and monthly obligations.

Your desk or whatever space you have should be off limits to students. However, because some students may not comply with this directive or the room may be used by others, make every effort to maintain privacy by writing notes regarding students cryptically, such as using initials only and storing confidential material in a drawer that can be locked, if possible.

- ▶ 4. Your desk should have a file drawer where you can keep folders for each of your students that contain IEPs, cumulative folders, and other important information. This drawer should lock, as it contains students' private information. You may also want to make files for other school-related information that is important to you. These might include bulletins and communiqués from your principal or the office, items from your special education administrator or supervisor,

school policy information, committee materials, and any other things you may want close at hand. If you work in various classrooms, you may also want to keep a folder for each one to hold things you need to know such as upcoming tests, special activities or trips, or other information from the general education teacher. If you don't have a file drawer, consider purchasing a plastic filing container to store this information. Because it is portable, however, it should be stored in a locked area whenever you are not in the room.

- ▶ 5. You say you don't have a desk or space of your own? Discount stores usually have rolling carts or file-type drawers on wheels that can work very well and are not too expensive. Ask a colleague or administrator if your school has funds allocated for teacher materials. If not, make this one-time purchase yourself, and think of it as a career investment. Rolling carts and files cabinets can be pushed to any area you may temporarily call home and will provide you with an organized way to carry your supplies and needed information with you. Items to keep in your traveling cart include: lesson plans for classes you may be teaching or coteaching, extra supplies to lend out to students, graded work to return to students, teacher editions, positive reinforcers, discipline referral forms, and a backup lesson plan—just in case.

## Forms and Schedules

**Teachers—especially special education teachers—are inundated with forms and schedules. Finding a way to make these user-friendly and useful is important. Here are some ideas.**

- ▶ 1. Depending on the grade level you teach and the setting in which you teach, such as an inclusive classroom or a more restrictive setting, your students' schedules may be quite similar or very different, so you might find it helpful to create a master list of all of your students' schedules. Not only will this help you create an agenda for yourself that ensures services are provided to all students on your IEP list, but it also can be a quick way to direct students who may have forgotten their daily schedule.
- ▶ 2. Refer to your IEPs to make certain you are providing services to your students for the time period indicated on the IEP. Students may be served in an inclusion setting or a resource setting where teachers work with individuals or small groups of students. If you work with students outside the general education classroom, do your best to make sure you are teaching content that is aligned as closely as is practical to the general education curriculum so your students can keep up as much as possible. If you are supporting students within the general education classroom, make sure it's at a time when they can really benefit from your help. For example, if a student only requires direct special education support in math, you will want to schedule time to be in that particular class. Sometimes, it takes real thought to create a schedule that involves each of the students you serve in his or her IEP goal areas, especially if you have students in many different classrooms. See the section "Developing Your Schedule to Support Students," in Chapter 3 for some helpful ideas.

- ▶ 3. To save time in your busy day, make forms and templates that can be reproduced and used again. Use lists that can be checked off or circled to save time rather than repeatedly writing tedious notes. Create forms for behavior reports, notes home, and meeting schedules. Using different colored paper for different forms or academic areas makes it easier to quickly access what you need. Also, develop a form or template for your general education teachers to complete that provides you with information about what will be covered in their classrooms each week. Figure 1.2 is one example of this form.
- ▶ 4. You may also want to create a template for your weekly schedule. Share this with the general education teachers in your teaching unit so they are aware of the days you will be directly supporting students in their classrooms, the days you will be involved in IEP meetings, and where to contact you in case an immediate concern arises. You should also give a copy of your schedule to others who may need to keep in touch with you, such as paraprofessionals, administrators, and supervisors.

## Room Arrangement

**If you have a classroom—or perhaps a corner to call your own—it is imperative that you make economical use of the area. Even if your space is limited, you must still serve your students efficiently. So, you need to be organized—here’s how.**

- ▶ 1. When setting up your room or your work area, it is important that materials and equipment are easily accessible with adequate space for maneuverability. Your chalkboard, dry-erase board, or overhead screen should be visible from all seating areas. You may wish to set up an area for small-group activities as well as some separate areas for those students who need an area with limited distractions to complete their work. If you have computers, they should be separate but visible from all areas so that you can monitor students’ activities there.
- ▶ 2. To make transition into and out of your classroom as quick and efficient as possible, materials on your shelves should be easily accessible and organized in a logical manner. Labeled baskets or bins are commonly used organizational tools. Depending on how you are providing services to students, you may want to have separate baskets for each class hour or each subject area.
- ▶ 3. Designate an area of your shelving to be used as a resource center and include items such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, thesauruses, grammar guides, and specific topic-related materials based on what your students are currently studying.
- ▶ 4. If you are traveling from room to room, staying organized is a special challenge. Using a rolling cart or file drawer on wheels that can be stocked with materials you need for each class can be a practical way to stay prepared (see above under “Your Desk and Surrounding Areas”). Keep supplies for different classes in separate containers so you can quickly transfer them to your cart—and off you go, prepared and organized for your next lesson.



**Figure 1.2** Class at a Glance

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Week of \_\_\_\_\_

Academic information for following class(es) \_\_\_\_\_

To identify areas in which students will need assistance, please provide a summary of lessons to be taught for the week.

**READING**

Title of Book: \_\_\_\_\_ Pages to read \_\_\_\_\_

In class assignments during the week?  Yes  No Days \_\_\_\_\_Homework during the week?  Yes  No Days \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**WRITING/LANGUAGE ARTS**In class assignments during the week?  Yes  No Days \_\_\_\_\_Homework during the week?  Yes  No Days \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**MATH**

Assignment Pages \_\_\_\_\_

In class assignments during the week?  Yes  No Days \_\_\_\_\_Homework during the week?  Yes  No Days \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS** \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you, your input is appreciated,**

**Special Education Teacher**

Copyright © 2007 by Corwin Press. All rights reserved. Reprinted from *Common-Sense Classroom Management for Special Education Teachers, Grades 6-12*, by Jill A. Lindberg, Dianne Evans Kelley, Judith Walker-Wied, and Kristin M. Forjan Beckwith. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, www.corwinpress.com. Reproduction authorized only for the local school site or nonprofit organization that has purchased this book.

## Wall Displays

**Organized teachers use wall displays to provide consistency and structure throughout the school day. Items to display include informational postings, visual cues, and instructional content. But what if you don't have a wall? If you haven't guessed by now, special education teachers need to be creative. Here are some suggestions for what to post and how to post whether you have a wall or not.**

- ▶ 1. Informational postings let students know what is expected of them. Suggested postings include: classroom rules and consequences; course materials list; hourly bell schedule; emergency procedures; and a calendar of key dates such as exam dates and vacation days. Items that should not be posted include students' grade point averages, personal contact data, and any other information that should remain confidential.
- ▶ 2. Many students with disabilities rely on visual cues to help them remember what to do or how to do things. Some examples include learning strategies for reading, writing, and math; multiplication tables; and examples of how to properly label work to be submitted. To further strengthen the effectiveness of visual cues, consider using different colors as well as graphics such as arrows.
- ▶ 3. Even if you have limited space to call your own, it's still important to find a way to display pertinent information. If you work in general education classrooms, most pertinent information will already be posted. However, you might want to ask your coteacher for bulletin board or wall space to post additional information that will assist the students with disabilities.
- ▶ 4. Some special educators travel from classroom to classroom throughout the day to provide instruction and support within the large group via coteaching or by working with a small group within the general education classroom. In these instances, you may need display space for instruction (post the lesson agenda, vocabulary words, and so on). However, there may be insufficient time available to write all this down on the board before you begin the lesson. The following are some suggestions that will enable you to include visuals in your instruction without using valuable instructional time.
  - a. Most classrooms have an overhead projector. Prepare your transparencies prior to instruction. You can handwrite or use your computer to type the lesson and print the transparencies directly from your computer's printer. If you have not created them from a computer printer before, read the box carefully to make sure you purchase the type that is compatible with your printer.
  - b. A trifold display board (sometimes used in science projects) is sturdy enough to stand upright on its own yet is portable as it can be folded when not in use. You can buy sticky gum at most drug stores or teaching supply stores to mount things temporarily on these boards. Because items can easily be attached and removed, you can reuse the board for different lessons.
  - c. A portable whiteboard is another option. Use a dry-erase marker to record lesson content on the whiteboard prior to the class. Then, when

it's time to teach, lean the whiteboard up against the chalkboard or drill a hole at the top of each end and string sturdy cord through the holes so that the whiteboard can be hung from a map hook.

- d. A highly portable alternative to the whiteboard is the *Instant White Board Office Edition*. You can place these 2" × 3" plastic static film sheets anywhere because they stick to any surface. As with the traditional whiteboard, you can write on these with a dry-erase marker, wipe off when finished, and reuse. When not in use, the sheets are rolled up and stored in a tube. You can order this item from the following Web site: [www.presentationresources.net](http://www.presentationresources.net).
- e. The use of technology in the classroom is on the rise. Document cameras, LCD projectors, and Smart Boards are just a few examples of technology that can be powerful instructional tools yet require little setup time. Find out what technology is available in your school and make a point of learning how to use it.