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A. Caseloads for Special Education

Chapter 14 has consistently included caseload requirements which restrict the number of students assigned to any one teacher, depending upon the level and type of support received by the students. The maximum number of students permitted on a special education teacher's caseload under the revised regulations remains essentially the same as it was under the previous version of Chapter 14. The only real changes made to the caseload provision are the removal of part-time support, and the maximum caseload numbers associated with such support, and the replacement of the term resource support with supplemental support. As such, there are now three levels of support: (1) full-time support (special education supports and services provided by special education personnel for 80% or more of the school day); (2) itinerant support (special education supports and services provided by special education personnel for 20% or less of the school day); and (3) supplemental support (special education supports and services provided by special education personnel for more than 20% but less than 80% of the school day).

Maximum caseload numbers for itinerant support and full-time support remain the same as they have for the past several years, while maximum caseload numbers for supplemental support are identical to the old resource support numbers. Thus, the maximum teacher caseloads range, depending upon the type of support, from 12 to 65 for itinerant, 8 to 20 for supplemental, and 8 to 15 for full-time. Under certain circumstances, however, school districts may request approval from the Pennsylvania Department Education for a caseload chart that varies from the one set forth in the regulations.

In addition to modifying the definitions for the levels of support, the revised regulations also expand the previous definitions for each of the types of support available to students including, blind and visually impaired support, deaf and hard of hearing support, emotional support, learning support, life skills support, multiple disabilities support, physical support, and speech and language support. More specifically, each type of support now includes a description of the kinds of needs that the support is meant to address. These expanded definitions should prove helpful to parents and other members of the IEP team in ensuring that a child's needs are truly being addressed in his or her program.

The definitions of three of the types of support available to students, however, go much further than including a description of the kinds of needs that the support is meant to address. Specifically, the definition of autistic support, blind and visually impaired support, and deaf and hard of hearing support actually include needs and/or services that the IEP must address. For instance, the definition of autistic support now requires that the IEP of a student receiving this type of support address the verbal and nonverbal communication needs of the child; social interaction skills; the child's response to sensory experiences and changes in the environment; and the need for positive behavioral support. For students who are blind or visually impaired, the IEP must now include a description of the instruction to be provided to the child in Braille, or the extent to which Braille will be used for the student's learning materials. Finally, for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, the IEP must include a communication plan to address language and communication needs, academic levels, and assistive technology and services.