

# TEACHER PAPERWORK: ORIGINS & IMPACT

UNDERSTANDING HOW TEACHERS' PAPERWORK  
BURDENS CAN INHIBIT INSTRUCTIONAL EXCELLENCE

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Project 10.2 / August 2016

**QUESTIONS: Do teachers feel their paperwork burdens inhibit instructional excellence? Which paperwork burdens are heaviest for teachers to bear?**

## BACKGROUND

In 2011, the School and Teacher Paperwork Reduction Act (Session Law 2011-379, House Bill 720) charged the State Board of Education (SBE) to reform the paperwork that teachers must submit. It called on the SBE to identify the required reports and eliminate the unnecessary ones, allow all reports to be submitted electronically, and prevent the repetitive submission of information, either through duplicate forms or providing information already available. In 2012, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) published their response, identifying how many reports local education agencies (LEAs) had to submit to the state and federal governments. The paper identified 80 reports that the federal government required and 52 more that either the North Carolina General Assembly or the SBE required. Twenty-two additional reports were identified as required by both.

The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions (TWC) Survey also asks teachers about their beliefs on numerous topics. The survey asks the extent to which they agree to different statements and about the magnitude of that sentiment. In the 2016 TWC Survey, 72% of teachers agreed that "Teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students," an increase from 66% in 2014. Sixty-five percent of teachers also agreed that "Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers are required to do." This statistic is also an increase from the 2014 TWC Survey (57%). These numbers seem positive but ignore their relationship with the other questions. Of a total 85 questions, the teachers' agreement to the second statement about minimizing paperwork earned the third-lowest rate of agreement in the 2016 TWC Survey. The former statement about having sufficient instructional time rated marginally better: it was only the twelfth-lowest percentage of agreement.

This research investigates teacher sentiment regarding paperwork and seeks to better understand their plight. The study hopes to cast light upon the administrative burdens that teachers face in order to reduce them and make our teachers both more effective and supported.

## METHOD

To better understand the paperwork burdens that teachers face, we first researched the legislative mandate to reduce teachers' administrative burdens and teachers' current perceptions of paperwork, using their responses from the 2016 TWC Survey. We then created a survey (Appendix 1) through SurveyMonkey to receive their feedback. The survey sought to uncover the amount of teachers' time paperwork required, whether that paperwork fulfilled its purpose, which forms needed the most time,



and which administrative body was responsible for that paperwork. We then studied the responses and analyzed their descriptive statistics. We also connected our survey responses to the survey responses from the 2016 TWC Survey to draw conclusions and better understand the responses to our survey.

## RESULTS

Between May 25-June 26, 2016, 7,913 teachers representing every LEA took the survey. The top ten LEAs in teachers responding accounted for 37.7% of all respondents. Respondents had the opportunity to indicate their role in the school. Figure 1 details the percent of respondents from each county. Seventy-four percent of teachers identified as classroom teachers. Another 9% identified as Exceptional Children (EC) teachers, and 8% reported being specialty teachers.

We grouped specific forms together to better understand the amount of time teachers spend on different types of paperwork. A majority of teachers reported spending 1-2 hours per week completing each of the following types of paperwork: student-based meetings, grade-level meetings, school-required meetings, student behavior, and student performance. A majority of teachers reported spending 3-4 hours per week on lesson planning. In total, the majority of teachers spend 8-14 hours completing paperwork each week. Some teachers reported spending even more time doing paperwork. Fifty-four percent of teachers reported spending more than 3 hours on paperwork on student performance. Lesson planning took up more than five hours for 39% percent of teachers. The full table of responses to this set of questions is in Appendix 2.

A majority of teachers also reported spending 1-2 hours per week on each of the following non-paperwork but non-instructional duties: additional supervision of students, involvement in

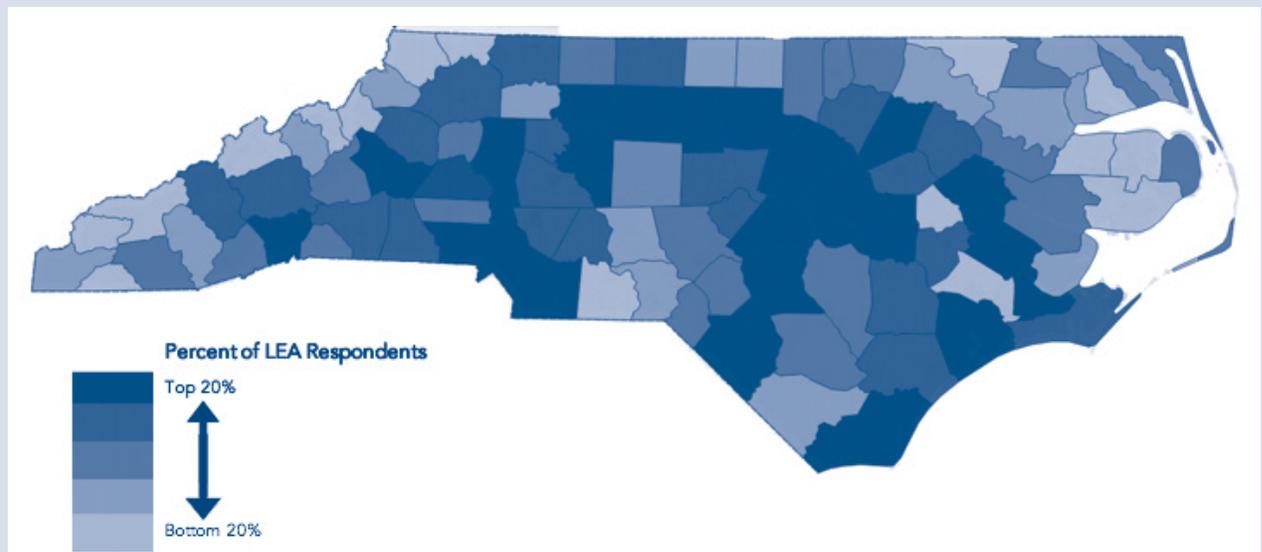
extracurricular activities, school-required meetings, instructional planning meetings with coaches, grade-level meetings, student-based meetings, and student discipline meetings. These responses added up to 7-14 hours for a majority of teachers on additional obligations. The full table of responses can be found in Appendix 3.

Teachers overwhelmingly agreed that multiple forms cover identical or similar information and that the paperwork burdens prevent them from effectively teaching. A substantial majority also indicated an understanding of the purpose of their paperwork requirements. Less than half of respondents reported that their paperwork informed supervisors' or peers' decisions about instruction. Appendix 4 includes the table detailing the specific percentages of the teachers' agreement or disagreement to these statements.

Figure 2 on page 3 details the responses regarding the most time-consuming forms. In order to better understand respondents, answers were categorized together to create broader topics. Response to Instruction (RTI), the system of multi-tiered supports for students, yielded the highest number of responses for the most time-consuming forms, as well as the highest for second-most and third-highest for third-most. References to progress monitoring, personalized education plans (PEPs), or intervention forms placed a response into this category. Lesson planning was the second-most common response for the most time-consuming forms. The remaining top responses were, in order, 504s and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), behavior, and assessments.

Figure 2 also includes the administrative body that requires that form. Respondents reported that their district and DPI are most responsible for RTI forms. Lesson planning was reported as more of a local issue. 504s and IEPs, as federal requirements, were frequently connected to the U.S. Department of Education. Behavior forms were reported as primarily a school issue, and state, district, and school assessment garnered teachers' attention. The highest

**Figure 1. Percent of Respondents from Each County**



**Figure 2: Most Time-Consuming Forms and the Administrative Body Which Assigns Them**

Categories	Grade-Level	School	LEA	DPI	National	Percentage
RTI	0%	13%	46%	36%	4%	16.1%
Lesson Planning	3%	56%	33%	6%	2%	13.4%
504s/IEPs	5%	8%	10%	30%	51%	12.7%
Behavior	3%	67%	22%	7%	1%	8.1%
Assessments	2%	18%	28%	49%	3%	6.7%

responses for second-most and third-most time-consuming forms, shown with the administrative bodies responsible for the form, can be found in Appendices 5 and 6, respectively.

Shown in Figure 3, respondents indicated that their school, DPI, and their LEA required most of the forms that they had to fill out. Grade-level teams and the U.S. Department of Education received less credit for the paperwork burdens. Almost 88% of respondents indicated that one of those two requires the least amount of paperwork.

**Figure 3: Administrative Bodies' Responsibility for Teachers' Administrative Burdens**

Administrative Body	Percentage of Teachers Who Believe It Requires the Most Paperwork
Grade-Level Team	10.3%
Your School	27.2%
Your District	24.1%
State / DPI	25.8%
Federal Government / U.S. Department of Education	12.6%

Respondents had five choices for improving the forms they had cited earlier in the survey. They overwhelmingly (49%) chose simplifying the forms as the method to improve the forms. For each the most, second-most, and third-most, simplifying the forms was the most common recommendation. Few teachers, only 8%, recommended clarifying the forms. Figure 4 displays the percentages of respondents who indicated their recommendation for improving the most time-consuming form.

**Figure 4: Teachers' Recommendations for Improving Most Time-Consuming Forms**

Clarify	Consolidate	Eliminate	Shorten	Simplify
8%	16%	22%	26%	49%

Some respondents left additional comments before completing the survey. They stressed the extra time that the paperwork consumes and the problems that creates. The bullets below cite direct quotes from their feedback:

- “I feel that no matter how much we speak out, no one is listening. All the needless paperwork is taking away from

my teaching. After teaching for 17 years, it shouldn't take 7-8 hours a week to complete lesson plans.”

- “I am with children from 7:25 until 3:00 except when I am in a meeting or training. I rarely take a lunch break away from paperwork. I rarely leave school on time and I have paperwork every weekend.”
- “I love teaching, but I am burning out due to the amount of work I have to take home each day and on the weekends.”
- “The art of teaching is getting taken away and replaced with a mountain of paper work...”
- “It is so stressful to try and teach each and every student when we are constantly stressing about paperwork. ”

## CONCLUSIONS

The survey responses indicate that teachers believe they spend too much time on paperwork. Eight to fourteen hours, the amount of time that the majority of teachers spend on paperwork, exceeds the amount of time that teachers have during their planning periods of the week. Teachers necessarily have to find other opportunities to complete this work. They already have 7-14 hours of additional tasks to do. On average, teachers are spending between 15-28 hours on non-instructional activities per week. Their responses indicated that teachers believe these paperwork burdens are adding additional, undue stress on them. These paperwork burdens are adding additional stress on the state's teachers. Reading their comments in the survey clarified and emphasized this point. Several mentioned leaving the profession, and others discussed their disbelief that they must spend so much time outside the classroom completing these administrative tasks. So many of the responding teachers want paperwork reform.

Students also may also benefit from paperwork reform. The comments confirmed that teachers believe they could be more effective instructors if their administrative burdens could be eased. These paperwork burdens could be preventing teachers from teaching North Carolina's students the important lessons they need to learn. An overwhelming majority of teachers believe that the paperwork inhibits their ability to teach effectively. Almost three-quarters have noticed that multiple forms ask for identical or similar information. This paperwork may also have a minimal impact: more than half of respondents do not observe their administrative efforts having an impact on instructional decisions.

Responding teachers believe that these paperwork burdens decrease their effectiveness, which would hurt student learning.

Simplified forms, especially for forms that are currently requiring the most time, will decrease these burdens. For example, Appendix 7 includes a Tier III intervention request, one RTI form to request highest level of intensity of interventions for a student, from one district that asks for three pages of information from teachers. This form does not include the pre-form that teachers must submit before working on this one. Appendix 8 shows a similar form from another LEA. It has only one page but fulfills the same goal. Easier forms would make teachers' jobs easier.

DPI has other ways to simplify teachers' paperwork burdens. It already has a template for lesson planning, the second-most common topic that respondents reported takes up the most time. Through Schoolnet, DPI has begun to collect and spread resources that teachers can use for their lesson planning, instead of using multiple forms to submit to different levels of administration or tirelessly searching for information to include in their lessons.

PowerSchool, the portion of Home Base focused on holding student information, can be utilized to decrease the time these forms take. Placing forms in Home Base will allow the forms to auto-populate, or fill in the blanks with information already in the system in PowerSchool. This process will simplify the paperwork for teachers, who will have fewer blanks to fill themselves. The use of technology, as the School and Teacher Paperwork Reduction Act indicates, can lower the administrative burdens teachers face.

While simplifying the forms was the respondents' primary recommendation, consolidating forms seems to address some of their concerns. Such a high percentage, almost 75% of teachers, indicated that multiple forms ask for identical or similar information. While only 16% of respondents recommended consolidating forms, another 22% answered that the most time-consuming form should be eliminated. Given that most teachers understood the purpose of the paperwork they must complete, forms that teachers believe should be eliminated may very well be duplicate forms. PowerSchool can also save time for teachers when forms ask for duplicate information by automatically filling those spaces, leaving teachers to insert only the new information.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this research and the survey's results, we have four recommendations for the State Board of Education to consider:

1. The State Board of Education may direct its efforts on simplifying teachers' paperwork, focusing its efforts first on RTI forms.
  - Survey respondents indicated that RTI forms are the most time-consuming forms they face. Simplifying them will ease their administrative burdens. The new ECATS system aspires to reach this goal, so DPI can monitor its usage as it begins to ensure it achieves its purpose.
2. The State Board of Education may instruct DPI to collaborate with districts and schools to consolidate paperwork and to remove forms asking for duplicate information.
  - Combining forms will decrease the amount of time teachers spend on paperwork, so that they can focus on other tasks, such as instruction, instead of repeating information in different formats.
3. The State Board of Education may instruct DPI to create form templates to disseminate to LEAs for local use.
  - Form templates will guarantee simplified forms are available to teachers in all LEAs. Home Base already contains a lesson planning template, so DPI now can focus on encouraging the LEAs to distribute it to their teachers.
4. The State Board of Education may encourage school leadership to reduce paperwork required from school, grade-level, and committee-level meetings.
  - Administrators and other school officials can contribute to the paperwork reduction efforts by minimizing the paperwork they require from their teachers that duplicate what already is asked of them from LEA and state officials and finding new ways to ensure effective meetings with staff members.



## APPENDIX 1: SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. School District:
2. Name of School:
3. Teacher Role:
4. Grade Range:
5. On average, how many hours per week do you spend on completing paperwork for the following activities?
  - a. Student Performance (e.g. benchmark assessments, progress monitoring)
  - b. Lesson Planning (e.g. lesson plans, planning with coaches/mentors)
  - c. Meetings Required by School (e.g. faculty meetings, committee meetings)
  - d. Grade-Level Meetings (e.g. agendas for school leadership, grade-level reports)
  - e. Student Based Meetings (e.g. 504s, IEPs, parent-teacher conferences)
  - f. Student Behavior/Discipline (e.g. PBIS reporting, disciplinary reports)
  - g. Other
6. On average, how many hours per week do you spend on required additional duties?
  - a. Additional supervision of students (before or after school, transitions, lunch, recess)
  - b. Involvement in extracurricular activities (sports, clubs, programming)
  - c. Meetings required by the school (faculty meetings, committee meetings, PTA meetings)
  - d. Instructional planning meetings with coaches (literacy, math, science/SS)
  - e. Grade-level meetings
  - f. Student-based meetings (504s, IEPs, parent-teacher conferences)
  - g. Student behavior/discipline meetings
  - h. Other
7. How strongly do you agree with the following statements?
  - a. The amount of paperwork I am required to complete prevents me from spending time effectively teaching.
  - b. I understand the purpose of the paperwork I am required.
  - c. Multiple forms that I am required to complete cover similar or identical information.
  - d. Supervisors or peers use the paperwork I complete to help inform decisions regarding instruction.
8. Please list, in order, the three most time-consuming administrative forms that you are required to complete.
9. Which administrative body requires you to complete that form?
  - a. Grade-Level Team
  - b. Your School
  - c. Your District
  - d. State/DPI
  - e. Federal Government/U.S. Department of Education
10. Please state your recommendation for improving these forms.
  - a. Eliminate it.
  - b. Clarify it with more detailed instruction.
  - c. Merge it with another form.
  - d. Shorten it.
  - e. Simplify it.
11. Please explain your recommendations from the previous question or state what your recommendation would be, if it is not listed.
12. From your perspective, which administrative body requires you to complete the most paperwork? (1 being the most, 5 being the least)
  - a. Grade-Level Team
  - b. Your School
  - c. Your District
  - d. State/DPI
  - e. Federal Government/U.S. Department of Education
13. Is there anything else you would like us to consider? We would appreciate any additional insight you can provide.

## APPENDIX 2: TEACHER PAPERWORK BURDENS PER WEEK

Hours Spent	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7+
Student Performance	5%	41%	34%	10%	10%
Lesson Planning	1%	18%	42%	20%	19%
School Meetings	6%	63%	26%	3%	2%
Grade-Level Meetings	15%	64%	17%	2%	1%
Student-Based Meetings	14%	65%	15%	4%	3%
Student Behavior & Discipline	23%	58%	14%	3%	2%

### APPENDIX 3: TEACHERS' WEEKLY BURDEN OF OTHER OBLIGATIONS

Hours Spent	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7+
Supervision of Students	5%	43%	34%	10%	7%
Extracurricular Activities	37%	40%	12%	3%	8%
School Meetings	7%	74%	16%	2%	1%
Planning Meeting with Coaches	28%	56%	12%	2%	1%
Grade-Level Meetings	23%	62%	12%	2%	1%
Student-Based Meetings	17%	65%	13%	3%	2%
Student Discipline Meetings	33%	54%	9%	2%	1%

### APPENDIX 4: TEACHERS' AGREEMENT TO PAPERWORK STATEMENTS

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The amount of paperwork I am required to complete prevents me from spending time effectively teaching.	3%	27%	44%	26%
I understand the purpose of the paperwork I am required to complete.	4%	23%	63%	10%
Multiple forms that I am required to complete cover similar or identical information.	3%	23%	49%	25%
Supervisors or peers use the paperwork I complete to help inform decisions regarding instruction.	11%	39%	45%	4%

### APPENDIX 5: SECOND-MOST TIME-CONSUMING FORMS

Categories	Grade-Level	School	LEA	DPI	National	Percentage
RTI	0%	16%	45%	35%	3%	11.5%
Behavior	2%	63%	25%	7%	3%	10.9%
504s/IEPs	1%	12%	19%	33%	35%	10.4%
Lesson Planning	5%	56%	30%	9%	1%	8.8%
Development	1%	28%	26%	43%	1%	8.6%

### APPENDIX 6: THIRD-MOST TIME-CONSUMING FORMS

Categories	Grade-Level	School	LEA	DPI	National	Percentage
Behavior	3%	63%	23%	8%	4%	11.4%
Development	4%	25%	27%	43%	2%	9.4%
RTI	2%	17%	47%	30%	5%	8.8%
504s/IEPs	2%	18%	20%	32%	30%	8.2%
Assessments	4%	21%	39%	30%	6%	6.6%

## APPENDIX 7: LONGER TIER III INTERVENTION REQUEST FORM

### Pre-Tier III RtI Process / Tier I & Tier II General Core Instruction & Assessment

#### Student Data

Attached the current student PEP or list the data that is available suggesting the need for strategies and interventions to promote student academic and/or behavior success:

Type	Documentation
EOG / EOC's	
Test	
Homework	
Behavior	
PEP	
Other-	

#### Parent Contact

List the parent contact information and the information that may help support the student's learning:

Student	Parent	Phone #	Email	Collaboration Information

#### Strategies / Interventions

List the strategies and/or interventions that will be implemented to help support the student's success:

Date	Strategies / Interventions

#### Monitoring Progress

At the end of each week of intervention, document the progress of the student:

Week	Date	Documentation of Progress (include the need for more intensive strategies and/or interventions)
Week 1		
Week 2		
Week 3		
Week 4		

#### Next Steps:

1. Student has been successful in academics and/or behavior; Tier III RtI is not needed
2. Complete Tier III RtI Request

APPENDIX 7, CONTINUED

**Staff Requesting Tier III RtI:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary Reasons for Tier III RtI Request:** (check all that apply)

- Academic
- Behavior
- Communication
- Family
- Parent request for evaluation
- Parent request for Tier III RtI
- Relationship Concerns
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Has the student had excessive absences/tardies/truancy in their school career?** \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No (If yes, attach relevant attendance history)

**Previous Tier III RtI Request?** \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Reason for Tier III RtI Request (include how the student is performing in comparison to his/her peers in the core instruction):**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Student Strengths (check all that apply)**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Completes assignments               | <input type="checkbox"/> Participates in class discussion              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Considerate of others feelings      | <input type="checkbox"/> Proficient in age appropriate athletic skills |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperative                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading at or above grade level               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Displays leadership ability         | <input type="checkbox"/> Sense of humor                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Follows class rules                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Skilled in problem solving/reasoning          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Follows instructions                | <input type="checkbox"/> Turns in homework on time                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Makes friends easily                | <input type="checkbox"/> Works well independently                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics at or above grade level | <input type="checkbox"/> Works well with others                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____                         |  |

**Areas of concern (check all that apply)**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disorganized                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor assignment completion   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poor handwriting                | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor math skills             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty following directions | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor reading skills          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poor writing expression         | <input type="checkbox"/> Anxious / fearful            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apathetic                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Angry / Defiant / Aggressive |

APPENDIX 7, CONTINUED

- Depressed / Withdrawn / Lethargic
- Easily frustrated
- Hyperactive / Disruptive
- Immature
- Inattentive / Impulsive
- Comments inappropriately / blurts out
- Poor syntax
- Sequencing difficulty
- Speaks excessively
- Speaks infrequently / non-verbal
- Speaks in single words / phrases
- Extended illness in family
- Lacks basic needs
- Recently family change (i.e. separation, divorce, new member, recent move, unemployed parent)
- Recent family death
- Detached from others
- Bullies others or overly aggressive
- Inappropriately affectionate
- Difficulty making friends & relating to others
- Picked on by others
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Interventions**

Area of Concern	Intervention	Person Responsible

Teacher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Next Steps:**

1. Tier III RtI Request submitted to SST Coordinator
2. A Case Manager is assigned
3. Case Manager & teacher reviews the data and insures that all data has been collected
4. Case Manager will arrange for a Classroom Observation to be completed
5. Parent contact
6. Tier III RtI Team will meet about the student to formulate an Intervention Plan

## APPENDIX 8: SHORTER TIER III INTERVENTION REQUEST FORM

Please fill out the following information to make a referral to your school's RtI Tier 3 Team. Specifically, submit your form to the chair of the RtI team. A meeting date should be occurring within 2 to 3 weeks of receiving the referral. An assigned case manager will follow up with you prior to the meeting.

Student Name:	Student ID #:
Grade:	Student Birth Date:
Teacher (s):	
Date of Referral:	Date Referral Received by Chair:
Referral Type: <input type="checkbox"/> parent <input type="checkbox"/> PLC <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher <input type="checkbox"/> Other (list) _____	
Name of Referring Party:	
Contact Information for Referring Party:	

Please list the student's strengths:

Area of Concern (check all that apply):

Academic  Behavior  Attendance  Health  Speech  OT/PT  Other

Description of Referral Concerns checked above:

Describe any specific data for this student:

A Tier 3 RtI referral requires a minimum of 2 prior parent contacts. Please document contacts below:

(1) Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Type of Contact: \_\_\_\_\_  
Parent concerns/comments: \_\_\_\_\_

(2) Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Type of Contact: \_\_\_\_\_  
Parent concerns/comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Referral to Tier 3 RtI has been discussed with the parent?  Yes  No

Does the student have a current PEP?  Yes  No

If no, why not?

If yes, what interventions are in place? (please attach a copy of the current PEP to this referral)

Please list any staff members who are also working with student directly to provide services or who have a relationship with the student:

What would be the best day(s) and time(s) for someone to observe the student?



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The Financial and Business Services Area is in its tenth year of the Research Intern Program. The Program is designed to help build a quality research program within NCDPI to supplement and supply data for discussions related to procedural, process, and policy changes. This year's program included students from Duke University's Master of Public Policy program and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Master of Public Administration programs. The intern program is managed by Eric Moore (919-807-3731) | intern\_research@dpi.nc.gov.

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