

Preface

David had failed class, actually several classes, and his parents were livid, but not because David hadn't received good instructional time or hadn't been exposed to the grade-level curriculum. His parents were upset with the teachers for not notifying them of David's impending failure.

Many teachers in the meeting pointed out that the parents had been notified via the mandatory progress report, which conveniently never made it into the parents' possession. One teacher, on the other hand, produced a phone log indicating the times he had contacted the parents because of David's missing work, provided the parents with several of David's assignments with their signatures on them indicating notification of a failing grade, and a detention slip signed by the mother—the detention was for failure to complete a major project.

At first the parents wanted to argue with the teacher, implying that he hadn't done enough to notify them, but in the face of all the records they admitted that they were disappointed in David and their trust in him had been broken.

Although 25 percent of all secondary schools are currently involved in lawsuits (see www.Edweek.org), the likelihood of you, as a teacher, being involved in a lawsuit is lower. Unfortunately, the chances of your classroom practices being called into question are much higher.

A colleague of mine was absent for the day, and the substitute teacher showed a video that was inappropriate. When Samson returned from his illness, he was bombarded by angry parents' phone calls about the previous day's "lesson plans." Luckily, Samson had written clear lesson plans for the substitute teacher that did not include watching a video. He had a record of his intentions for his students regarding the curriculum to be covered in his absence. Instead of wasting time defending his practices in the classroom, Samson quickly responded to the angry parents with a copy of the lesson plan left for the substitute teacher, which reassured parents of Samson's professionalism. The substitute teacher was never called to work within the school district again, and Samson had parental support for the remainder of the year.

WHY KEEP MORE RECORDS?

Most teachers already spend a hefty chunk of time each day keeping records: recording grades, documenting classroom management, attending

meetings, and keeping notes. If you are already spending so much of your work week documenting and reporting on your actions with students, how could you possibly keep more records without jeopardizing your instructional time with students, your planning time for students, or your private time with family?

Keeping more records does not require you to spend more time keeping records. It requires you to manage the paper trail already produced in your daily teaching to justify classroom decisions, protect yourself against unwarranted attacks, and provide your school and/or school district with records for improving instruction for future curriculum decisions. You will find that managing these records saves you time in the course of your day, your week, your semester, your school year, and in your teaching career.

GOALS OF THE BOOK

As teachers we deal with stacks and stacks of paper every day. How do we manage those and more papers without a full-time secretary to help us? The goal of this book is to provide you with tools and techniques to use the papers already generated in your day, to fine-tune paperwork for use as records, and to create time-saving records to alleviate some of the time-consuming practices you may be using.

In our daily teaching, papers are naturally generated that can be used for record keeping. Papers like messages from the front office, parent letters generated from the office, and school meeting agendas can all be filed for future reference. Your lesson plans or planning book and other papers you create in your day-to-day teaching can be used to inform your decisions. With an understanding of how these papers can be filed for later use, you will be able to begin keeping records without adding any time to your teaching day.

Finally, creating some record-keeping practices will actually save you time in the course of your teaching year and your teaching career. Using documents records such as phone logs, tutoring sign-ins, or seating charts will help you to keep accurate records of your parent contacts, your time with students, and behavioral management in class. These records require very little of your time up front and save you time in the long run, especially if your practices are ever called into question.

The goal of the book is to help you keep records to inform your decisions, plot your successes, and save time.

WHAT KIND OF RECORD KEEPER ARE YOU?

Each year at tax time, I sit down and gather all my records. Now, my records are more like a paper trail, literally. I'm the Hansel and Gretel of keeping records, collecting rocks to drop along my path to find my way home so I don't end up in the IRS's oven. I don't sit down once a month as is suggested in most books to log in my expenditures and record my

receipts. I don't use a computer program or any other electronic form of keeping records. Instead, I have a drawer where I throw all my receipts for the year or, if I'm really organized, an accordion file to throw these papers in until a week before my tax appointment.

A week before my tax appointment, I empty out my drawer of papers and begin stacking them into piles: rentals, school, home, child care, et cetera. Inevitably, I keep papers that I don't need and that end up in the trash, but rarely is there something I need that I didn't keep. Once I have stacks, I begin organizing them and calculating my numbers to give to Big Al, my taxman.

I know my system appears to be unsystematic. How do I keep track of whether or not I'm staying within my budget? How do I know if I'm going to come out ahead or behind at the end of the year for taxes? My answer: It's all in my head. I'm intuitively a good money manager. I don't need to sit down every month to keep track of my finances. Would I do a better job of managing my money if I did? That remains to be seen. Once my child is grown and I have more time on my hands I may try another method, but for now, given my time commitments to my family, career, and hobbies, this system is working for me.

This is how I keep records at school, too. I have a file folder for all discipline records, a file folder for all parent contacts, and files for student work. When I have a meeting or need to justify a referral for special programs, I sit down with my folders and pull out the papers I need to accomplish my goal. As with my taxes, there are many papers in these folders that I never use in the course of the year, and at the end of the year I throw those papers away. On the other hand, I always have all the papers necessary when I need to document my actions with a student or with curriculum.

On the other hand, I have friends who track every dime they spend each week. They pay all their bills online and use an electronic money manager to record their income, their expenditures for living, and their spending habits. When it's tax time, they push a button on their computer, and all their records are done for them. Of course, they still have their paper trail, but they don't have to dig through it all to prepare for taxes. They have been organizing their records a little at a time each month.

Likewise, there are teachers who keep a file on every student and daily records of actions taken in the classroom. Some teachers keep this record as a journal; others create forms to fill out at the end of any significant interaction. Still others use their computer to keep these records.

These are examples of extreme types of record keepers. Each of us falls somewhere on this continuum. It is important for you to find the type of record keeping you are the most comfortable with and then use that to your advantage. The book will provide you with the wide spectrum of how to keep records, from the Hansel-and-Gretel method to the manager expert. It is up to you to try the different methods to discover which works best for you. No matter what type of record keeper you are, this book will help you to keep accurate records, to manage them better, and to be able to present them in a convincing manner when necessary.

OVERVIEW OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1 shows you how to use papers and plans you are already generating as records of your teaching decisions, curriculum planning, instructional strategies, and classroom decisions.

Chapter 2 reviews methods of keeping records for student assessments. It examines the use of portfolios, grades, assignments, and numerous other assessment tools and how these need to be recorded for information regarding student achievement and growth, for information to inform your decisions regarding instructional practices and classroom management, and for presentation to other stakeholders in your educational setting.

Chapter 3 provides you with methods of keeping track of your parent contacts from phone calls home to sending home grades. Chapter 4 helps you to keep records regarding your classroom management to provide you with information about a student's time on task, to help you document the need for special programs, and to provide evidence of your intervention with students who have behavioral issues.

Chapter 5 provides you with techniques to keep records detailing the accommodations you make for students with special needs. It also provides you with templates for creating records in this especially litigious area of teaching. Chapter 6 prepares you for using your records in meetings with parents, administrators, or outside agencies.

Finally, the book provides an appendix where you will find all the templates used in the book, along with suggested books for more in-depth looks at record keeping for specific areas.