

## **SPEECH-LANGUAGE ASSISTANTS IN THE SCHOOL SETTING**

*Deb Brossard, MS CCC-SLP*

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Historical notes on the school-based efforts to investigate and make recommendations regarding Speech/Language Pathology Assistants or a similar level of professional dates back several years. The original study proposal was dated 1992. A summary is provided in this document although an in-depth description of these efforts may be found in the DPI SLPE Pilot Project documentation. This Pilot was designed to explore the use of Speech-Language Para-Educators in the public schools. The program was funded by IDEA discretionary funds. Continuation of these funds was not made available in 2000. These paraprofessionals were envisioned as educational assistants working under the direct supervision of a DPI-certified SLP. The supervision required for these para-educators significantly exceeded the ASHA guidelines but apparently worked well in the participating districts. However, because the advisory group did not complete final recommendations for the SLPA license, these could not be forwarded by then DPI SLP consultant, Kate Morand.

Realizing a need for the SLPA across settings in Wisconsin and following an internal survey, Northeast Wisconsin Technical College in Green Bay, Wisconsin has developed a program to train individuals. The program complies with the educational and training guidelines and recommendations outlined by ASHA.

Mixed reactions regarding SLPAs have permeated the WI school-based practice setting. Positive reactions from some districts (both at the administrator and DPI-licensed SLP level) have resulted in investigating or in fact hiring SLPAs to assistant positions in school-based settings. However, negative reactions to the SLPA concept have been expressed by others at both DPI-licensed SLP levels and administration levels for various reasons.

One constituency in particular who has expressed formal opposition to SLPAs in school-based settings has been WEAC Exceptional Educational Council members at the WEAC 2000 and 2001 Representative Assemblies. The resolution presented at WEAC assemblies by these members stated that such an SLPA license would trivialize the knowledge base of the school-based SLP. It was the feeling of this group that a 'qualified provider' should be defined as a 'fully certified speech-language pathologist'. The previous definition defined this as "individuals who met State Educational Agency (SEA)—approved or SEA—recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements...". While there were also SLPA-supporting resolutions drafted for the WEAC assemblies, the resolution taken to the floor and passed by the assembly was in opposition to the hiring of SLPAs.

In Wisconsin, all speech/language services delivered in the schools will be delivered by a DPI-certified speech/language pathologist. Further, the IEP would identify if the SLPA could be a part of the service delivery plan. While the use of speech/language paraprofessionals is anticipated in the future in some model, this is not the current state of affairs across Wisconsin.