



**WISCONSIN
SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY
and AUDIOLOGY ASSOCIATION**

Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services
4797 Hayes Road, Suite 101
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The Wisconsin Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology Association thanks WCASS for the conversations regarding the roles and responsibilities of school-based speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and the difficulty some districts have expressed regarding their ability to fill SLP positions. WSHA remains committed to: 1) ongoing discussions; 2) collaboration with WCASS to collect data; and 3) dissemination of information based on the data. Continued collaboration between WSHA and WCASS would ensure professional practices that support the highest quality services for children in Wisconsin consistent with IDEA rules, WI Chapter 115, and ASHA guidelines.

However, WSHA cannot support the *Guidance to School Districts Facing Shortage of Speech & Language Pathologists* in its current form for the following reasons:

- WSHA supports the dissemination of information related to recruitment and retention of speech and language pathologists as a stand-alone document by fall 2014; however, additional guidance should not be disseminated until there is a plan to collect valid and reliable data to examine the trends and patterns related to a perceived shortage. This plan would include, but not be limited to, data describing recruitment and retention, admissions practices and partnerships with IHEs, and models of service delivery. Data would be used to more precisely address the issues of attracting and retaining school-based SLPs through on-going education for administrators and SLPs.
- WSHA objects to the inclusion of information that supersedes decisions that must be determined by individual IEP Teams (e.g., use of telepractice, identification of who provides services for students', and utilization of special education aides as solutions to a perceived shortage). DPI has already provided guidance on these issues in accordance with IDEA, and such guidance should be limited to decisions governing the IEP process to meet the needs of individuals identified with special education needs. Guidance designed to clarify the rights of individuals and their families should not be extended as a solution to a personnel shortage because of the potential for misunderstanding or misuse of this information resulting in violations of IDEA.
- WSHA objects to the language: "when facing a shortage" and feels it must be replaced with the following language "when documented efforts to attract or retain a licensed SLP have been unsuccessful".

We remain committed to being WCASS's partner in assuring the best, evidence based practice for Wisconsin public school students with speech and language disabilities. In addition WSHA is concerned for each school district that is experiencing difficulty with recruiting and retaining SLPs and for the children who subsequently receive inadequate speech and language disability programming. We remain optimistic that collaboration is the best way for assuring what each of our associations wants: quality speech and language service for Wisconsin school age children.

WSHA looks forward continuing our collaboration and partnership.

Sincerely,

Mary Bahr Schwenke, M.S., CCC-SLP
WSHA President

History:

In 2012, an effort to address the shortage of speech-language pathologists (SLPs) in the schools, proposals had been introduced by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB) for a 3 tiered licensing system for speech and language disability program provision. The tiered system proposal would have allowed individuals with high school, associate and bachelor's degrees to provide SLP services under the supervision of DPI licensed SLPs.

Although a perceived shortage of school-based SLPs has been the catalyst for these proposals and subsequent conversations, the Wisconsin Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology Association (WSHA) was not called to the table to participate in the discussion or provide guidance regarding these proposals. With the strength of a unified voice of Wisconsin SLPs and WSHA, this proposal for 3 tier licensing was halted.

WSHA is grateful to have been awarded Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the ASHA Pathway to Excellence Personnel Grant to (1) educate, inform and advocate for highest quality services in the schools; (2) Gather accurate data regarding the nature of the shortage and (3) Collaborate with stakeholders to gather information regarding the perceived shortages.

As a result, WSHA created an ad hoc committee and was able to begin gathering data from various stakeholders to provide a more objective perspective regarding speech-language pathology shortages in Wisconsin public schools as a means of countering any perceived notion of urgent need for decreasing standards for school based speech-language pathology.

In the fall of 2013, WSHA was invited to be active members in a Statewide Task Force lead by the Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services (WCASS) regarding SLP Best Practices and Technical Assistance. WSHA presented at the WCASS Winter Conference (February 2014), "Attracting Qualified Speech-Language Pathologists to Your School District".

WSHA continues to address workforce issues with the support of the ASHA Grant and dedicated ad hoc committee members. WSHA has participated in a number meetings with WCASS representatives and DPI and continues to do so on-behalf of our profession.

WSHA would like to extend their gratitude to the members of the ad hoc committee who have been spending countless hours addressing the SLP workforce issues in Wisconsin: Casey O'Keefe, UW-Whitewater; Kathleen Erdman, Marquette University; Sondra Reynolds, UW-Stevens Point; Patricia Schraeder, UW- Madison; Dawn Merth-Johnson, Iowa-Grant School District; Laurie Schmidt, New London School District; Mary Bahr Schwenke, MJ Care; Ramie Zelenkova, WSHA Lobbyist and the Badger Bay Management Team.

The work on this issue is ongoing and WSHA appreciates continued member support and feedback.