



# Leadership, Change and Growth: Empowerment for SLPs in the Schools

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For me, this is a familiar image - people in the organization ready and willing to do good work, wanting to contribute their ideas, ready to take responsibility, and leaders holding them back, insisting that they wait for decisions or instructions.

Margaret J. Wheatley

## Vision

To create a speech-language department that exemplifies best practices including alignment with EBP, ASHA, federal, state and local regulations, staffed by county employees with unique talents and abilities, who recognize and are responsive to the needs of our diverse student population. SLPs employed by Loudoun County Public Schools will be instructional leaders working in collaboration with educational colleagues to enhance outcomes for all learners.

The world is moved not only by the mighty shoves of the heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker.

Helen Keller

## Challenges

- Increasing student population- approximately 7% per year
- Increasing population resulting in increasing numbers of students in Special Education
- Increasing number of students with speech-language services with increasing amounts of service time (more than 60 minutes/week)
- Approximately 6,200 students in Special Education
- Approximately 3,400 of those students receive Speech-Language services
- Increasing cultural and linguistic diversity
- Over-reliance on contracted staff (close to 32%)
- Retention issues – turnover of approximately 10% of SLP staff each year
- Increasing number of schools and staff: In last 14 years, the district has doubled number of schools and tripled staff size
- Budgetary cutbacks coupled with high community expectations for outstanding educational quality
- Inconsistent professional practices across the county: Eligibility, service provision, and dismissal
- New leadership after long tenure of previous supervisor

## GOALS

- To improve overall working conditions by improving workload, physical environment, provision of materials
- To increase awareness by the staff and community of the role of SLPs in the school setting
- To improve recruitment and retention of SLPs
- To maximize resources including staff development, materials, and personnel allotment within fiscal constraints
- To improve consistency of professional practice with regard to assessment and eligibility for service
- To increase SLP proficiency in the area of bilingual/bicultural assessment
- To improve the utilization of inclusive models
- To provide supportive leadership to help staff to thrive in a climate of change

We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used to create them.

Einstein

## Strategies

### Recruitment

- Increased participation with student programs
- Capitalized on previous relationships with higher education
- Student externships/opportunities for screening hours
- Improved relationship with ASHA and DOE
- No cap on years of experience for experienced SLPS (including years in other settings).

### Retention

#### • Caseload/Workload

- State maximum 68, LCPS 55 average
- Inclusive practice and grouping
- Pre-school model
- Hearing Impaired Model
- Evaluation teams, including dysphagia

#### • Leadership support

- Monthly meetings and training for new SLPs
- Task force to address day-to-day challenges
- Mentorship for all SLPs new to LCPS
- Active CFY supervision
- Onsite coaching with consulting SLP
- Opportunities for school-based SLPs to share expertise with colleagues
- Bottom-up leadership approach
- Recognize colleagues for personal and professional accomplishments

- Supervisor attends meetings of Special Education administrators, eligibility coordinators, diagnostic director, teachers of students with autism and multiple disabilities,
- Non-judgmental open-door policy to share concerns and request assistance for professional and personal issues

#### • Continuing Education

##### • District-sponsored

- Fluency Class
- Voice Class through local hospital
- Educational cohorts: autism, leadership
- Financial assistance for conferences
- ASHA Online Autism training
- Speech-Language-Hearing Association of VA
- ASHA
- Other conferences of professional interest

#### • Technology

- Virtual classroom
- Social networking among staff- just for fun!

## Opportunities to “Lead Where You Are”

• SLPs support colleagues and act as consultants in specific areas of expertise. SLPs support each other in the areas of

- Bilingual and bicultural assessment
- Feeding
- Apraxia
- Pre-Kindergarten assessment and service
- Secondary practices
- Autism
- Non-verbal students
- Materials development and sharing
- Inclusive models: grouping and scheduling

• SLPs are encouraged to be instructional leaders at their schools and to present to teachers and paraprofessionals

• SLPs are encouraged to present at local, state and national conferences

A leader facilitates the search, the community takes ownership of the quest for innovation and change.

Pascale & Sternin

Before you become a leader success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is about growing others.

Jack Welch