



## NCLB, Early Reading First: How SLPs Can Contribute

### Request

Include language in the re-authorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act that would identify qualified school-based speech-language pathologists as professional reading resources in the schools.

### **Speech-Language Pathologists –The Early Language & Literacy Experts**

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) have the specialized knowledge and experience needed to identify communication problems and to provide the help that children need to build critical language and literacy skills. SLPs are often the first professionals to identify the root cause of reading and writing problems through the child's difficulty with language.

With their help, children can build the skills they need to succeed in school and in life.

Key elements of a speech-language pathologist's academic training relating to early language and literacy development include skills to:

- Build and reinforce relationships between early spoken language and early preliteracy abilities and consider influences of parent-child interactions in early shared storybook interactions;
- Address difficulties involving phonological awareness, memory, and retrieval;
- Teach children to use tactile -kinesthetic and auditory cues in reading and writing;
- Analyze how the language demands of textbooks, academic talk, and curriculum may stress a student's capabilities at different age and grade levels; and
- Conduct fine-grain analyses of written language, including spelling, to generate intervention that matches the needs of individual students.

### **How Speech-Language Pathologists Can Contribute**

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are essential to the team responsible for helping students learn to read and write. There are many ways that SLPs can help all children learn to read and write 6, including:

- 1) **Prevention** – Communicating risk factors to teachers and parents, and working with them to develop programs to help children acquire explicit, age-appropriate knowledge, skills and strategies of the components of language that contribute to reading and writing development.
- 2) **Identifying At-Risk Children** – assisting in development and implementation of screening (e.g., instruments and teacher observation checklists) and referral procedures for very young children as well as older school-age children, including modifying procedures to reduce bias (e.g., dynamic assessment techniques and criterion referenced tasks) for culturally and linguistically diverse populations.
- 3) **Assessing** – selecting, implementing, adapting, and interpreting assessment tools and methods to evaluate skills in spoken language, reading, writing and spelling.

- 4) **Providing Intervention** – collaborating with teachers and families to plan intervention goals and activities, as well as modifying curricula to keep students progressing in the general education curriculum.
- 5) **Documenting Outcomes** – establishing a tracking system for identifying new or reemerging literacy deficits and documenting outcomes of intervention goals and plans.
- 6) **Program Development** – directing or participating in teams to develop school or system-wide strategic approaches to early identification and intervention for children with reading deficits.
- 7) **Advocating for Effective Literacy Practices** – providing information about literacy development to state and local agencies that plan and evaluate curricula, establish comprehensive assessments and set related policies; educating them about relationships between spoken language and written language (i.e., reading, writing and spelling) and the benefits of collaborative instructional approaches.
- 8) **Advancing the Knowledge Base** – conducting scientifically-based research on early literacy development.

### **Facts on Early Literacy**

Literacy problems in the United States have reached the point of being considered a major public health problem, with serious health and educational consequences.

- One out of every 5 of our nation’s school-age children suffer from reading failures.<sup>1</sup>
- A majority of all poor readers have an early history of spoken-language deficits. A recent study reported that 73% of 2nd grade poor readers had phonemic awareness or spoken language problems in kindergarten.<sup>2</sup>
- A child who is not a fluent reader by 4th grade is likely to struggle with reading into adulthood. Today, 41% of fourth grade boys and 35% of fourth grade girls read below the basic level, and in low-income urban schools this figure approaches 70%.<sup>3</sup>
- Poor reading and writing skills have a devastating lifelong impact – 75% of school dropouts report reading problems, and at least half of adolescents and young adults with criminal records have reading difficulties.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, this scenario can be changed with proper identification and intervention.<sup>5</sup>

For more information please contact Neil Snyder, ASHA’s Director of Federal Advocacy, by phone at 202-624-7750 or via e-mail at [nsnyder@asha.org](mailto:nsnyder@asha.org).

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<sup>1</sup> Lyons. RG. “Measuring Success: using Assessments and Accountability to Raise Student Achievement”; State before the Subcommittee on Education Reform, Committee on Education and the Workforce, U.S. House of Representatives; March 8, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Catts, HW, Fey, MD, Zhang, X & Tomblin, JB. “Language basis of reading disabilities: Evidence from a longitudinal investigation”; *Scientific Studies of Reading*; 1999; 3:331-361.

<sup>3</sup> National Center for Education Statistics (1998)

<sup>4</sup> Lyons. RG. “Measuring Success: using Assessments and Accountability to Raise Student Achievement”; State before the Subcommittee on Education Reform, Committee on Education and the Workforce, U.S. House of Representatives; March 8, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Fletcher, JM, Lyon, RG. “What’s Gone Wrong in America’s Classrooms”, Evers, WM; Hoover Institution Press; (1998).