

Getting Your Message Across

What Is Required?

- Learn all the facts to make the strongest argument for your position.
- Express views in a clear and concise manner and ask for a commitment.
- Organize arguments and encourage others to get involved.
- Contact elected officials and media representatives about the issue.

What Are the Methods?

- Personal visits are the most effective means of getting your point across.
- Letters and e-mail also give you an opportunity to let opinion-makers, such as the press or members of your legislature, know where you stand.
- Telephone calls and emails allow you to convey your message when time is of the essence.

How Can You Make Your Message Effective?

- Do your homework. Know the facts and details backwards and forwards.
- Make sure you have at least two positive messages that you want to include. Keep them in mind and raise them whenever it is appropriate.
- If you encounter hostile questioners, it is important to remain professional. Don't appear indignant. Don't lose your cool. If you are right, you don't have to, and if you are wrong, you can't afford to.
- Know the possible negative subjects or counter arguments of your opponents and prepare in advance to answer them in a positive and constructive way.
- If an opponent throws a barrage of questions at you, sift through and look for the one that you feel most comfortable answering.
- If you don't have all the answers, say so; but offer to get back to them quickly, and do so.
- Keep your message simple and try to keep your message free of complex language.

When Should You Get Involved?

- Start early!! Salary supplement legislation must go through several stages of review between the time a bill is introduced and it becomes law. The legislative process begins before the public hearing, and then proceeds through various stages of review and debate by both the State House and Senate chambers. You may be able to discuss your issues with legislators on an interim study group even before the legislation is introduced or reintroduced.
- Express your views while the legislation is being heard in committee.
- Remember that issues can arise on short notice. In those instances, quick action on every one's part can mean the difference between success and failure.

How To Reach the Media and Generate Awareness

By working with the media, you can reach more people more quickly. The readers, viewers and listeners who receive information from the press will be your ultimate allies in supporting the salary supplement concept at the state or local level.

Separating your issue from the multitude of others that fight for media attention and coverage each day is as challenging as fighting for the issue itself. Because issues change, you must be prepared to articulate the goals and concerns and the solutions on a consistent basis.

An important tool in this effort will be an information kit that you can develop and customize using the materials in this guidebook as a base. The purpose of the information kit is to raise awareness among the press about the issue. (Refer to the sample documents in this section that can and should be copied and distributed.)

Help the press help you. To do that, your first step should be to develop a framework for communication with the media.

General Framework

- Develop media lists for the outlets in the state capitol, in the zip code areas where critical members on key committees reside, and in areas where there are large populations of public school children. Each media directory should list the major, as well as local, print and broadcast organization and include reporters, producers, and their respective phone/fax numbers along with email. Disseminate the lists to all local members or chapters. Be sure to have your written information ready so you can email or fax it over immediately if requested.
- At the same time, build a data base. Data base information should consist of state profiles and biographies of key leaders on the issue at local, state and national levels.
- Agree on the message points of the campaign.
- Create press releases and advisories that announce significant activities to local broadcast and print press.

Identify events within the next 90 days that could provide a platform for favorable publicity on the state association's activities and the salary supplement issue.

- Establish a speaker's bureau for specific areas in your state whose members would be available to address meetings, gatherings and events concerned with children (e.g., PTA meetings) and/or the salary supplement issue.
- Draft op-ed pieces for submission to local newspapers stressing the need for reaching children and the significance that proper language, speech and hearing skills have on their lives. Publications have guidelines and formats for accepting these letters. Find out what they are and adhere to them.

Target the Right Media

Your efforts to promote the salary supplement issue will help increase awareness of the professions and the benefits it provides. As you begin devising your plan:

- Identify the individuals in the media who are most apt to write about the issue in the paper, or talk about it on the news. Contact your local newspaper and ask for the name of the city editor, education and/or health reporter, statehouse reporter and any "children's issues" reporter that they have on staff. Contact the radio stations for the name of the person who covers education and/or health and the news assignment editor at the state capitol. When calling your local television stations, ask for the name of their news assignment editor or planning desk editor, health/education reporter and the political and children's issues reporters they have on staff.
- Create a media list that will help you narrow the list so that you contact the appropriate individuals in the media with your message. Verify the outlet's address, phone and fax numbers and the correct spelling of each reporter's name and title. Leave space beside your media list where you can write notes on your conversations. For example, "interested" or "call back at 2:00 PM" so you can easily keep track of the media's interest in the issue.
- Learn about the special sections or reporters who usually write about children's education, children's health, and political issues. These individuals will be more apt to listen to you. And remember that by doing your homework, you will save time and money, and increase your chances of having your story listened to when you make the right connection.
- Determine the best method to communicate with your media contacts.
- Make sure your message is targeted and your story is appropriate to the media you are pitching. Keep in mind the interests and needs of the audience before you pitch the story.
- Make yourself easily accessible. Let media contacts know to call or email you when they need information on the salary supplement issue.
- Once you've developed good working relationships with your media contacts make sure to keep in touch.

Tips for Pitching TV

- Make certain they have your press release.
- Create a “pitch” script and practice before you contact them. Make sure it incorporates your message points.
- Provide information for contacting people who can be interviewed.
- Be aware of the importance of having a visual for television. Pictures of people actively engaged in a discussion, photos of supporters holding brightly colored signs, etc., will encourage media to film your event.
- Follow up with the TV media the day before you hold an event or the day before a bill is to be voted on in order to verify their attendance.

Tips for Pitching Radio

- Make certain they have your press release.
- Create a “pitch” script and practice before you contact them. Make sure it incorporates your message points.
- Suggest the station send a person to your gathering at the event for a “live remote.” See if the station will broadcast their radio show live from your event and invite participants to be interviewed on the radio.

Other Hints

- ***Never*** swamp a media outlet with multiple faxes. Fax the materials once. Make a follow up call to see if they received the material, and if they did not, if they are interested in your resending it. If they do not want the information, ***do not send it.***
- Be aware that reporters are generally on strict deadlines and usually have to file their stories around 4:00 PM. It is to your advantage to try and reach them before 9:30 AM and 3:00 PM. If they are busy when you call, ask if you may call them back and at what time.
- Be enthusiastic about your issues and the story. Tell the media why they should cover the story rather than asking if they will.
- Don’t be intimidated by the media. You are an expert on the salary supplement issue and you can help the reporter tell an important story that needs to be heard.

Sample Letters to the Editor

Notes on Placement: The letter should be tied to an event or series of events that has garnered the attention of the media and the community. A budget surplus or a growing need in the number of children with special needs, such as language or other communication problems, or a shortage of qualified speech-language pathology or audiology professionals are items to consider.

To improve your letter's chances of placement, call the newspaper you plan to send it to and ask about the paper's policies concerning letters to the editor (for example, when will you hear if they are going to accept it for printing?).

If the first paper you send the letter to does not print it, send the letter to the next largest paper. As a professional courtesy, send the letter to only one newspaper at a time. Editors appreciate it.

Sample Letter to the Editor #1

Date

Name
Letters Editor
Newspaper
Address

Dear Name:

As noted in [name of article] published in the [date] edition of your newspaper, the increasing number of children with special needs is not only a national problem, but a local one as well. As a community, we, too, must address this situation head-on and live up to our responsibility to provide our children with the best care and education possible.

Data show that many of the children with special needs have speech, language or hearing disabilities that can be successfully and permanently corrected with the help of a certified speech-language pathologist (SLP) or audiologist. Without the help of these skilled professionals, experience has shown us that a disturbing cycle ensues. Left untreated, children with communication disorders are more likely to perform below their grade level, have difficulty understanding and giving verbal directions; are more likely to be held back, drop out of school, and fail to earn a high school diploma. Such problems severely limit their future. Without proper education, what are their prospects for good jobs and raising healthy children of their own?

The U.S. Department of Education's most recent report to Congress indicated that the number of children with speech, language and hearing disabilities is on the rise. From personal experience, I know that the number of professionals leaving the field is rising, too. Why not give these clinicians a special stipend (i.e., salary supplement) to induce them to remain in the profession? Wouldn't it be cheaper to pay these men and women now, rather than have to pay for our lack of attention in the coming generation?

Sincerely,

Your Name
Address
Telephone number where you can be reached

Sample Letter to the Editor #2

Date

Name

Letters Editor

Newspaper

Address

Dear Name:

In reference to your article [name of article] in the [date] edition of your paper, I want to go on record supporting the introduction of the bill that will provide a salary supplement for certified speech, language and hearing professionals who work in public schools.

Our state already gives a salary supplement [if yours is one of the 41 states that do] to teachers who have become certified by the teachers' credentialing organization. If these teachers can benefit from certification, why can't their nationally certified speech-language pathologists and audiologists enjoy a similar benefit? After all, the work of teachers and clinicians overlaps in many ways. Both groups provide direct instruction to students to improve language skills, and each works to improve educational outcomes for all students.

While the groups are in some ways similar, they are also vastly different. Teachers focus on teaching and content skills. Speech, language and hearing professionals, on the other hand, inhabit a different domain. They are focused on overriding the wide range of problems that are manifested in hearing, speech, and language disorders. These professionals work collaboratively in classrooms with teachers in addition to seeing children individually and in small group settings.

In its very essence, language is the result of a highly sophisticated set of mental and physical activities that must work smoothly. If indeed children are our "most precious resource," then let's ensure they receive the kind of high-quality, professional services they need and deserve.

Passing the salary supplement legislation is a small price to pay for allowing a child to enjoy his or her young years with their peers, without being the subject of teasing and ridicule if he or she is one of the many children who are different because of a speech, language or hearing problem.

Their ability to express themselves and be heard to their full potential as they become adults is the return on our investment in them today. It seems to me that the proposed salary supplement is a bargain for everybody. Let's make sure that today's children are ready and able to face the future.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Sample Letter to the Editor #3

Date

Name
Letters Editor
Newspaper
Address

Dear Name:

I read with interest your article [name] in your [date] edition about the bill to provide a salary supplement to speech, language and hearing professionals who work with children in the public schools.

Let's face it, millions of kids are diagnosed with speech, language, or hearing disabilities that interfere with their learning and school success. But the opponents of the bill would like to have us think that using more public funds for another "special category" is inherently wrong.

The old parable says: "Feed me a fish and I can eat for a day; teach me to fish and I can eat forever." Isn't this what the speech-language pathologists and audiologists are trying to do? Isn't that what the sponsors of this legislation are asking us to support?

Here is a rare opportunity for our lawmakers to pass a law that is chock-full of common sense. Let's hope they are up to the challenge.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Sample Op-Eds

Sample Op-Ed #1

The Next Generation of Success Stories Is In Jeopardy

By Sally Clark

John Smith was the first in his family to go to college. He went on to become the first African-American Fellow in [Political Science] at [university]. Mary Smith, a drama undergraduate, was the first woman to [lead the XYZ dance company] which received the XYZ achievement award last year.

Both of these accomplished individuals succeeded despite disabilities that were detected in their early years of grade school. And they are not the only success stories. There are thousands more like John and Mary, people who were hopeful and became successful because they had special help to overcome a hearing, speech, or language disability beginning at an early age.

But these opportunities may be diminishing. The school systems are experiencing more financial demands while the number of children who need special help for speech, language and hearing disorders is increasing nationally. The threats to the children are the result of professionals, trained to work with children on language, speech or hearing problems, who are leaving the public school system due to retirement, unfavorable work conditions, or more lucrative employment elsewhere.

The “escape hatch” for children with disabilities may be closing. Our organization is concerned that, as professionals leave the school system, bigger caseloads spread over a smaller number of professionals will have a negative effect on children in need. Their abilities can be improved when they receive special intervention for their disorder. The men and women of this profession are one of the best-kept secrets of the state and the nation and their results are more than just altruistic. On a direct and indirect basis, their contributions far exceed the investment of the public dollars they are allocated. They are the careful stewards of the children who are behind their peers but are capable of closing the gap.

A bill recently introduced by Senator/State Representative [Jones], [AB #9999] makes sense. If passed, the legislation will provide a salary supplement to speech-language pathologists and audiologists who remain in the public school system. [Add more specifics about your state’s bill.]

This approach to retaining professionals in the public school system has been passed in 41 states. Such legislation focused on providing a salary supplement to teachers who demonstrated above-average competency as measured by their certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). The state of Mississippi passed a similar provision in 1999 that would provide a salary supplement to speech-language pathologists and audiologists. Nine additional states have followed, including Arkansas, Delaware, Indiana, Louisiana, Missouri, Nevada, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, and West Virginia (funding is pending in Arkansas and Louisiana). The [Jones] legislation would mark the [second/third] time that a state has taken an

aggressive, forward-thinking approach to keep quality professionals in our school settings.

The professions of speech-language pathology and audiology are 81 years old. They have become a pillar within the diverse communities of the public school systems working with children from all walks of life. They offer the opportunity to maximize the educational potential of students by providing speech, language, and hearing services which improve educational outcomes. Their long-standing commitment to enhancing the learning skills of children is well known.

There is an urgent need to fund a salary supplement for these professions. So urgent, in fact, it is being debated behind closed doors by some.

The proposed legislation can strengthen our efforts to retain these little-known yet highly regarded professionals. Let's pass AB [number] and strengthen the learning opportunities to create the next generation of John and Mary success stories.

By-line: Sally Clark is the President of the [XYZ]. The {XYZ} is recognized by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) the nation's oldest and most prestigious certification agency for the speech, language and hearing professions. There are currently 127,000 ASHA-certified practitioners, [number] of whom practice in the state.

Word count exclusive of by-line: ____

Sample Op-Ed #2

Help Where It's Needed

By Alan Carmichael

The [XYZ] committee of the state [Senate] is being asked this week to consider providing a modest salary supplement to speech, language and hearing clinicians in the public schools. This is the right way to go; the proposal should be passed out of committee by unanimous vote.

Opponents of the legislation claim that teachers do the education and that only the best teachers should be rewarded. They are just a bit light on the facts. And the facts are these:

- Studies clearly document that children with language disorders are four to five times more likely to have difficulties in reading and writing. These children need the best services available, just as other school children need the best teachers. The best services come from professionals who have been certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA).
- The salary supplement for certified speech, language and hearing professionals will not disturb the traditional role of the teacher. In fact, it will enhance their ability to become effective teachers, especially new teachers who are confronted with students with many disabilities, who have an ever-increasing number of classroom preparations, and are being consumed with a growing share of other responsibilities. They need the special instruction, both in and outside the classroom, and consultation of these professionals to meet the school's educational objectives for all of their children.
- Mississippi is one of eight states that has enacted and funded legislation to give salary supplements to both teachers who have been certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and to audiologists and speech-language pathologists certified by ASHA. Mississippi recognized that those who are NBPTS certified have significantly less academic and clinical preparation than do certified speech-pathologists and audiologists. Whereas an NBPTS teacher can receive a supplement with only a BA or BS degree, their speech and hearing colleagues must have at least an MA or MS, complete a 36 week supervised clinical fellowship, and pass an objective national examination administered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS).

Our state legislators should pass the salary supplement bill in order to provide an incentive for the certified clinicians to remain in our state and in our schools. And, unlike teachers, these certifiers can bill through the school system for the work they do with children who are Medicaid eligible, making the "cost" of the salary supplement lower than it appears at first glance.

The proposed legislation is good politics and better policy. Let's call on our legislators and our governor to "do the right thing."

By-line: Alan Carmichael is President of the [XYZ]. The [XYZ] is recognized by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), the nation's oldest and most prestigious certification agency for the speech, language and hearing professions. There are currently 127,000 ASHA-certified practitioners, [number] of whom practice in the state. Word count exclusive of by-line: 466.

Sample Press Release

Note on Placement: You will need to format this release to reconcile it with your particular situation. If you do not have a contact at your local papers, make some phone calls and determine who should get the release. Send it via fax and follow up the next day with a phone call. If the reporter says he or she has no interest, do not push. It will likely take a while to establish a relationship, so don't give up. Before the release goes out, make sure that it has been run off on the appropriate letterhead for your group.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Name
Daytime telephone
Email address

ORGANIZATION SHOWS STAUNCH SUPPORT FOR BILL [Number] AIMED AT HELPING STATE CHILDREN

Today's date, Your City and State – The [organization's name] today announced support for legislation that would provide a salary add-on, or supplement, for those who work with children affected by hearing, language and speech disorders in the public schools.

The bill introduced by Senator/State Representative [Smith] [bill number] was a response to the rise in the number of children nationwide who have speech, language and hearing disabilities, and the rising number of professionals who are leaving the school system for better salaries and working conditions in other settings.

State chapter president [name] said, "We applaud Ms. Smith's willingness to come forward and introduce this bill. We know that without the help of skilled professionals a disturbing cycle will ensue since children with communication disorders are more likely to perform below their grade level, have difficulty understanding and giving verbal directions; be held back; and find their future more limited than their peers. Data show that many of the children with speech, language or hearing disorders can be successfully and permanently corrected with the help of a certified professional. This bill, if passed, is a down payment towards the future of these children."

The U.S. Department of education's most recent report to Congress indicated that millions of children are classified as learning disabled. Many of these children have language disabilities as the basis of their problems. The problem is not only national but local as well. In the state of [name] [add number] of children have been classified as such.

-more-

Forty-one states, as of 2007, have already legislated that teachers certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) are entitled to a salary supplement. Eight states have enacted and funded legislation that provides an annual salary supplement to certified speech, language and hearing professionals who work in public school settings. (Your state name) will be the (second/third/etc.) state to provide a salary supplement.

For more than 80 years, certified speech, language and hearing professionals have been providing services to public school children who have difficulty with learning language and speech. The state association was founded in [date] and currently has [add number] of these practitioners in the public school systems.

-end-

Sample Resolution

*The XYZ Organization
in the Matter of Public School Children and
Their Speech, Language and Hearing Needs*

WHEREAS, a proper climate to ensure availability of quality care for public school children with speech-language and/or hearing disorders should be a major concern of our state government; and

WHEREAS, early intervention of speech-language and/or hearing disorders immeasurably benefits the individual's education and quality of life and benefits the community as a whole

WHEREAS, intensity of quality intervention vastly increases the likelihood of entering the workforce and making financial and social contributions to society;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the undersigned desires to offer a solution to repair the looming crisis in public school children's access to quality care for their speech, language and hearing needs.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the undersigned, along with the State Speech-Language-Hearing Association, joins forces with the leaders of the community to discuss the needs of children with speech, language and hearing disorders and to support the creation of a salary supplement bill that promotes retention and entry into the professions of audiology and speech-language pathology so that all children in the public school system may have access to professional quality care, without delay.

Name of Organization