

**Project SLP-RRS:
Speech-Language Pathologist Recruitment and Retention in Schools**

Personnel Preparation Grant for
Speech-Language Pathologists in
South Carolina Public Schools

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Project SLP-RRS: Speech-Language Pathologist Recruitment and Retention in Schools

Purpose

The purpose of “**Project SLP-RRS: Speech-Language Pathologist Recruitment and Retention in Schools**” is to provide a system for addressing the critical need for school-based speech-language pathologists in South Carolina. This will be done by initiatives (1) to enhance recruitment of Speech-Language Pathologists who have the master’s degree in a graduate program approved by the State Board of Education for the preparation of speech-language pathologists and (2) to increase retention through improved working conditions in school settings.

Rationale and Extent of Need

The current certification requirements for an individual to begin working in South Carolina public schools as a Speech-Language Pathologist are the following:

- Master's degree
- Completion of an advanced program approved by the State Board of Education for the preparation of speech-language pathologists
- Minimum qualifying score/s on the area examination/s required by the State Board of Education

Website: www.scteachers.org/cert/Certpdf/TeacherCertificationManual.pdf

Speech-Language Therapists who are currently working without a master’s degree in speech-language pathology must upgrade to the master’s degree by 2015 as stated in Section 300.136 of the *Policies and Procedures for Programs for Students with Disabilities in South Carolina* at

<http://www.myscschools.com/offices/ec/publications/documents/eligibility.pdf>

"The following timelines have been established to meet the standards for the highest qualified provider for speech-language personnel: By January 1, 2015, all persons providing speech-language services in South Carolina will have a minimum of a master's degree in speech-language pathology."

Nationally, 29 states require the master’s degree and 11 states have licensure requirements in addition to school certification. According to informal survey information elicited from district coordinators of special education, currently there are 370 Speech-Language Therapists without a master’s degree in speech-language pathology in South Carolina Schools, with only 101 of them pursuing SLP status. Moreover, the survey information indicates that there are 54 school districts reporting vacancies for speech-language pathologists in school districts across South Carolina, indicating a critical shortage. Another concern is the additional need for speech-language pathologists that can provide Medicaid services and/or supervision. A speech-language pathologist in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) is an individual who meets one of the following requirements:

- Has a certificate of clinical competence from the American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA);
- Has completed the equivalent educational requirements and work experience necessary for the certificate;
- Has completed the academic program and is acquiring supervised work experience to qualify for the certificate.

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs), as members of the evaluation and IEP teams, are responsible for identification, assessment, determination of placement, consultation, service delivery, as well as scheduling and providing therapy services for students with concomitant disabilities ranging from severe to mild. They are increasingly involved in planning and implementing prevention and

intervention activities for children who are at-risk for academic failure. IDEA 2004 encourages collaboration of general education and special education staff in a problem-solving approach to providing a continuum of services to these children. Additionally, speech-language pathologists are integrally involved in the team process to determine appropriate services for preschool children. All of these responsibilities require increased time and workload and indicate the need for additional SLPs.

In addition to the need for increased recruitment of speech-language pathologists, there is the need for the retention of school-based speech-language pathologists. According to an informal survey of Special Education Coordinators, currently only 9 school districts have a workload system to determine caseload. There are concerns about the increasing time required for workloads consisting of direct services, support services, and professional responsibilities, such as assessment, consultation, collaborative teaming, caseload numbers, severity of students served, therapeutic planning, paperwork, and intervention. IDEA04 focuses on more intervention and less placement of children as speech-language disabled. Because of their knowledge of language development (which is the foundation for literacy), it is essential that SLPs have time to serve in leadership roles for development of intervention initiatives for literacy. Moreover, they must have time to adequately serve students on their caseloads according to each student's severity of need. In so doing, they will be able to provide the training that the students need to be successful in general education. The need for provision of efficient and effective services to bring about progress academically and functionally is essential to efficacy for the speech-language program. Unfortunately, the workload of many SLT/Ps prevents this quality of service. Moreover, the majority of school districts do not offer incentives to continue working in school-based positions, such as reimbursement of ASHA and/or LLR dues, additional paid workdays, stipend for Medicaid documentation, or opportunities for professional development. The survey indicates that 32 school districts provide a stipend or paid extra workdays, 24 school districts pay/reimburse for ASHA and/or LLR Licensure dues, and 10 school districts provide paid professional development. Twenty-nine school districts responded that they provide no additional benefits. Because of these concerns, there is the possibility that SLP/Ts are considering leaving the school system to go to private and clinical service environments.

Goals

The goals of this project are two-fold: (1) increase recruitment of school-based speech-language pathologists, and (2) improve working conditions so that retention of school-based speech-language pathologists will be increased.

- 1. Recruitment:** provide incentives to increase the number of school-based speech-language pathologists working in the field of speech-language pathology, with the requirement of their commitment to work in the schools for at least 5 years after receiving the master's degree
 - Scholarships will be offered to school-based speech-language therapists or classroom teachers to upgrade to the master's degree in the field of speech-language pathology;
- 2. Retention:** provide incentives to enhance retention of Speech-Language Pathologists who work in school settings
 - Recognition of workload responsibilities and severity of students on caseload when determining caseload number
 - Stipend for Medicaid documentation
 - Provision of and reimbursement for professional development activities/conferences to enable SLPs to maintain Certificate of Clinical Competence
 - Creation of Project SLP:RRS Advisory Team

Expected Outcomes of Project SLP-RRS

Project SLP-RRS will enable speech-language pathologists (SLPs), school districts, and the state department of education to provide improved services for children with communication needs. By increasing the numbers of speech-language pathologists in school districts, SLPs will be able to provide more comprehensive services that are required by IDEA'04. Students who need intensive and frequent services will benefit. Improved progress outcomes for students on caseloads will impact their performance and achievement on PACT and ultimately decrease the length of time required for speech-language services. All of the above will have a positive effect on data submitted for the State Performance Plan.

Target Population

The USC COMD Distance Education program will potentially serve all school districts.

Application Process

The following documents must be completed and submitted:

- **Project SLP-RRS Application** with attached copy of SC Office of Teacher Certification, letter of verification and recommendation from a school district in South Carolina, proof of acceptance into the University of South Carolina Communication Sciences and Disorders Program, verification of current scholarship/reimbursement (if applicable), and statement of commitment
- **Memorandum of Agreement** with the name of the South Carolina school district, date, and signatures from the school district superintendent and special services coordinator

Mail these two forms to the following address by May 15, 2006 (postmark):

Dr. Susan Floyd
Education Associate for Speech-Language Disability and Assistive Technology
South Carolina Department of Education
Rutledge Building, 1429 Senate Street
Columbia, SC 29201

Selection of Participants

Eligibility of applicants and selection of scholarship recipients will be determined by the receipt of the **Project SLP-RRS** Application (including attachments) and the Memorandum of Agreement.

Course Offerings

Participants will be able to take courses through **Project SLP-RRS** at no cost. Scholarships for coursework will be made available beginning with the 2006-2007 school year to qualifying applicants. The scholarships will cover the cost of tuition, fees, and books.

Time Schedule

The Office of Exceptional Children and USC Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders Distance Education Program will work collaboratively with district directors of special education in accomplishing the following tasks for participant enrollment and program evaluation:

Activity

Letter of announcement to school districts
Applications and district agreements returned
Participant selection and notification of acceptance
Report of number of participants completing courses

Target Date

April 2006
May 2006
June 2006
per semester

Program Evaluation

Evaluation is a critical component of **Project SLP-RRS**. The evaluation design is provided in Appendix C. The design is organized around a set of evaluation questions with corresponding sources of data, type of reporting, and timeline.

Project Administrators and Advisors

The **Project SLP-RRS** advisory team will serve as liaisons with participating districts.

Source of Funding: IDEA Personnel Development Funds

Memorandum of Agreement

The Memorandum of Agreement between the Office of Exceptional Children, S. C. Department of Education and school districts is in Appendix B.

Appendix A

Application

PROJECT SLP-RRS APPLICATION

Attach a copy of your certification by the South Carolina Office of Teacher Certification, a letter from a school district official verifying that you are an employee of the school district and recommending you for this scholarship, and proof of acceptance into the University of South Carolina Communication Sciences and Disorders Program.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Name _____ Social Security # _____
Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Email _____ Work Phone _____ Home Phone _____

PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION

Bachelor's Degree Major _____ School _____ Year _____
Master's Degree Major _____ School _____ Year _____

EXPERIENCE

School District _____ Special Education Supervisor _____
Type of Assignment _____
How many more years do you plan to work? _____
Years in the present school district (including current year) _____ Years in other school districts _____

CERTIFICATION

SC Certification # _____ Area/s _____

FINANCIAL STATUS

Do you currently receive scholarship funding? ____ If so, what amount? _____ (Attach verification.)
Do you currently receive reimbursement funding for tuition/coursework from a school district? ____
If so, what amount? _____ (Attach verification from school district.)

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

Attach a statement about why you want to be considered for this scholarship (500 words maximum).

I agree to remain employed in a South Carolina public school setting throughout the duration of the scholarship period and work as a speech-language pathologist in a South Carolina public school setting for at least five years after completion of the master's degree, or I will reimburse the SC Department of Education, Office of Exceptional Children, the cost of tuition, fees, and books at a rate of prime plus 2%. I authorize Project SLP-RRS personnel to use the information that I have provided for evaluation and research purposes related to the project. I also understand that I will never be named personally or identified publicly in any report.

The South Carolina Department of Education does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, or disability in admission to, treatment in, or employment in its programs and activities. Inquiries regarding the nondiscrimination policies should be made to the Director of Human Resources, 1429 Senate Street, Columbia, South Carolina 29201, 803-734-8505.

Signature

Date

Appendix B

Memorandum of Agreement

Memorandum of Agreement

The South Carolina Department of Education, Office of Exceptional Children and School District _____ enter into this Memorandum of Agreement on _____ (date) for the provision of **Project Speech-Language Pathologist – Recruitment and Retention in Schools (SLP-RRS)**. The South Carolina Department of Education agrees to provide scholarship funding for participants and advisory consultation for participating school districts. The school district agrees to provide the following:

- Flexibility for participant/s to enable
 - Mentoring by current SLP/s for participant/s
 - Observation of current SLP/s by participant/s

- Consideration of the following to enhance retention of SLPs in the school district:
 - Recognition of workload responsibilities and severity of students on caseload when determining caseload number
 - Stipend for Medicaid documentation
 - Provision of and reimbursement for professional development activities/conferences to enable SLPs to maintain Certificate of Clinical Competence

This memorandum of agreement is mutually agreed by the following entities:

Director, Office of Exceptional Children
S. C. Department of Education

Date

Director, Special Education
School District: _____

Date

Superintendent
School District: _____

Date

Appendix C

Evaluation Design for Project SLP-RRS

Project SLP-RRS Evaluation Design

Questions	Sources of Data	Reporting Timeline*
1. Has the content of the course work been adequate in providing instruction for needed skills and competencies?	Participants, Graduate Faculty	Final and Follow-up Reports
2. Has the content of the clinical practica been adequate in providing instruction for needed skills and competencies?	Participants, Graduate Faculty, Practicum Supervisors	Final and Follow-up Reports
3. Are participants progressing at an appropriate rate toward completion of the Master's degree?	Participants, Graduate Faculty	Interim report
4. What are the participants' perceptions of the program?	Participants	Interim and Final Reports
5. Has anticipated enrollment been maintained throughout the project period?	Advisory Team Graduate Faculty	Interim and Final Reports
6. What percentage of the initial qualifying group completed the program?	File data	Final report
7. Is the recruitment of project participants effective?	File data	Final Report
8. Does the selection and advisement of students facilitate graduation rate?	File data	File Data Final Report
9. Have the participants been employed by school districts?	Participants; Local Education Agency Superintendents	Follow-up Report
10. Are school districts providing retention benefits?	Participants; SPED Coordinators; Advisory Team	Follow-up Report

***Note:** Interim report is prepared at the end of each year. Final report is prepared at the end of the coursework. Follow-up report is prepared at the conclusion of the project period.