



August 13, 2020

The Honorable Mark Allan Schultz
Acting Assistant Secretary
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20202

RE: Proposed Requirements—The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
Paperwork Reduction Waivers (Docket ID ED–2020–OSERS– 0015)

Dear Assistant Secretary Schultz:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to offer comments on the June 5, 2020, *Federal Register* notice of proposed requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Paperwork Reduction Waivers by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education (ED).

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 211,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students.

Audiologists specialize in preventing and assessing hearing and balance disorders as well as providing audiologic treatment, including hearing aids and cochlear implants. Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) identify, assess, and treat speech and language problems, including swallowing disorders. More than half of ASHA members work in educational settings. The services provided by ASHA members help ensure students in schools receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment.

Audiologists and SLPs who work in schools are integral members of the education team. They provide important and valuable services that help students access the general curriculum and design individualized learning plans for students. ASHA members support students, families, and staff from early education through graduation in both general and special education.

Speech-language pathology services are highly utilized in schools as reported in the U.S. Department of Education's 2019 Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA, which shows that in 2017, the most prevalent disability category of children ages 3 through 5 served under IDEA Part B was speech or language impairment (42.4%).¹ In addition, speech or language impairment represented the second or third most prevalent disability category for students ages 6 through 21 in every racial/ethnic group served under IDEA Part B. Educational audiologists also provide valuable services to children who have hearing-related issues by helping them access ongoing evaluation, necessary technology, accommodations and interventions, and the general educational curriculum.

Excessive paperwork and high student to educator ratios can impede school personnel in their work to educate children. Special education teachers and related services personnel/specialized instructional support personnel, such as educational audiologists and SLPs, face unmanageable caseloads and excessive paperwork. The paperwork burden results from providers having to meet the federal, state, and local education agencies requirements of IDEA as well as Medicaid documentation. Excessive paperwork negatively impacts the functioning of schools, the quality of instruction, and associated student academic and vocational outcomes. In the most recent survey

of ASHA school-based members, ASHA again found that paperwork burden ranks among the top challenges faced in school settings.² We must collectively develop and implement practical solutions to address these issues and ASHA welcomes the opportunity to respond to this notice and partner with ED moving forward.

ASHA offers the following comments and recommendations on the proposed priority and definitions under the IDEA Paperwork Reduction Waivers.

Directed Question 3. We are particularly interested in comments regarding paragraphs (a)(6) and (a)(7) of the proposed requirements. These requirements originally appeared in the 2007 final requirement. (We discuss the 2007 final requirements in greater detail in the Background section of this notice)...

Comments.

In the interest of reducing the overall paperwork burden, ASHA recommends informing parents (in their native language) if there is a meaningful change in the amount and detail of information available to them. However, informed consent should not be necessary when paperwork reduction changes simply eliminate duplication in paperwork requirements.

Proposed Requirements:

Recommendation:

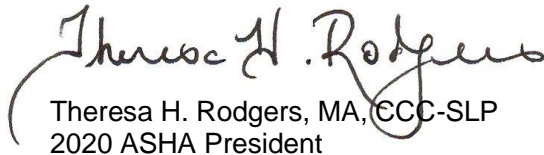
ASHA recommends that ED include a requirement for state education agencies and state Medicaid offices to collaborate to streamline and reduce the paperwork requirements for both IDEA and Medicaid.

Rationale:

The paperwork burden for audiologists and SLPs as well as other specialized instructional support personnel (SISP) is a long-standing issue that continues to be problematic for service providers. ASHA members report frustration with the increasing and often duplicative paperwork requirements from the two state agencies that implement IDEA and Medicaid. To meaningfully reduce duplicative paperwork requirements state departments of education and state Medicaid agencies must work together to reduce the burden on providers while complying with state laws and regulatory requirements for both programs by synthesizing documentation requirements and forms when possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these comments and recommendations on the proposed requirements under the IDEA Paperwork Reduction Waivers. Addressing the problem of excessive paperwork and administrative compliance remains a top priority of ASHA's school-based members. We look forward to collaborating with ED to reduce this burden. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Catherine D. Clarke, ASHA's director of education policy, at cclarke@asha.org.

Sincerely,



Theresa H. Rodgers, MA, CCC-SLP
2020 ASHA President

¹ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs. (2019). *41st Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2019*. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/41st-arc-for-idea.pdf>.

² American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2018). *2018 Schools survey. Survey summary report: Numbers and types of responses, SLPs*. <https://www.asha.org/uploadedFiles/2018-Schools-Survey-Summary-Report.pdf>.