Evidence meets practice: SLPs describe EBP in Virginia public schools
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INTRODUCTION

The “Data On Virginia Evidence-based practice in Schools: Speech Language Pathology (DOVES: SLP)” study collected practice data through an online survey designed in accordance with current theory and best practices in EBP in speech-language pathology (e.g., Dillaghan, 2004; Gillam & Gillam, 2006; Hoffman, 2007) and best practices in online survey research (Dillmann, 2006). The project’s specific intent was to elicit quantitative indicators of EBP, as well as open-ended qualitative input from speech-language pathologists (SLPs) throughout the state of Virginia.

This investigation was designed to answer four research questions:
1. What formal training have school-based SLPs in Virginia had in evidence-based practice?
2. What tangible and intangible resources are currently available through local education agencies to support evidence-based practice by school-based SLPs in Virginia?
3. With what frequency do Virginia school-based SLPs report engaging in specific EBP actions and activities?
4. What EBP training needs do school-based SLPs identify as important to them and relevant to their work in Virginia schools?

METHOD

A beta version of the online survey was piloted with 5 school-based practitioners during the autumn of 2009 to ensure that the survey questions were well-written and that the digital instrument collected data properly. Survey responses were collected statewide during January – March of 2010. To recruit respondents, the VDOE requested that the SLP coordinator in each local education agency forward survey invitations to their local personnel. Participation reminders were sent during the data collection period. While completing the survey, participants were allowed to skip any questions that they did not wish to answer, and were offered the opportunity to receive a “2010 School SLPs’ Clipboard Guide to EBP” digital resource as a token of appreciation for their time and effort.

RESULTS

Frequency of EBP activities as part of workload. The vast majority of school-based SLPs (90%) reported that during the previous school year, 0 to 1 hours (51%) or 1 to 2 hours (30%) per week were formally devoted to EBP activities in their regular work schedules. In addition, 85% reported that their work schedule for the current school year contained the same amount of time for EBP activities. Respondents additionally reported:

- 74% reported that they had formal training in EBP.
- 74% reported that they had informal training in EBP.
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- 74% reported that they had informal training in EBP.

Tangible and intangible resources. The majority of school-based SLPs reported that they have a computer with internet access (74%) at their worksite, but most were not sure whether their equipment configuration would allow access to electronic databases or search engines (60%). Almost all school-based SLPs reported that their school districts either did not have (42%) or were unsure (54%) whether their local education agencies had access to journal subscriptions or clearinghouses to support searches for research evidence. Less than 5% of respondents reported that the means and funds exist in their school district to reimburse SLPs for out-of-pocket costs associated with obtaining peer-reviewed journal articles to support EBP. A minority of respondents (less than 7%) reported that their school division had an identified system for evaluating research evidence, or formally identified peer-motors for EBP (11%). Likewise, only a small fraction of respondents reported having access to EBP study/support groups through their school division (less than 4%) or geographic region (less than 4%).

CONCLUSIONS

411 school-based personnel who provide speech-language intervention services to students in Virginia public schools participated in the survey. 331 survey participants provided an answer to the last question, revealing that at least 81% of respondents participated in the entire survey.

Of the 411 survey participants, 244 (59%) self-identified as ASHA members with CCC-SLP certification, while 83 participants (20%) reported that they were not ASHA members, and an additional 84 respondents declined to answer this question. The vast majority (91%) of respondents reported having a master’s degree.

As an aggregate group, the survey participants worked in all regions of the Commonwealth of Virginia and served students in preschool through high school settings.

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SELECTED REFERENCES


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ABSTRACT

An online survey of speech language pathologists (SLPs) regarding Evidence Based Practices (EBP) in Virginia public schools was completed in spring of 2010 with funding from the Virginia Department of Education for the purpose of documenting current practices in schools and informing plans for future support. More than 400 practitioners completed this survey, reporting current practice patterns in the public schools, their EBP training to date, perceived EBP resource needs, and future training preferences.

RESULTS

The majority of school-based SLPs in Virginia lack tangible resources for conducting quality evidence-based practice (EBP) activities in their regular work schedules. In addition, 85% reported that their work schedule for the current school year contained the same amount of time for EBP activities. Respondents additionally reported:

- 74% reported that they had formal training in EBP.
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CONCLUSIONS

Results of this survey revealed that many school-based SLPs in Virginia lack tangible resources for conducting quality searches for external evidence to support EBP, particularly access to scholarly products, and funding for costs associated with obtaining peer-reviewed research. Moreover, very few school districts provide intangible support, particularly with regard to guidance and mentoring on how to implement EBP in school contexts, although a substantial proportion of SLPs reported desiring this type of support.

Limitation: The total number of SLPs working in public schools throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia is currently not tracked by any known entity. Consequently, the representativeness of the survey sample and results cannot be fully determined.

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