



ASHA
American
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association

July 26, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and
Pensions
United States Senate
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and
Pensions
United States Senate
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Senator Burr:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to provide initial feedback as you begin bipartisan discussions to reauthorize the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA).

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 218,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students.

More than half of ASHA's members work in educational settings and/or provide early intervention services. These services help ensure that children with disabilities develop effective cognitive-communication skills and achieve successful learning outcomes while receiving a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. These services are also provided to general education students throughout the school setting.

As this bill advances through the legislative process, ASHA looks forward to partnering with you on committee priorities, including "how to ensure the research grants funded by the federal government produce research that is timely, useful, and addresses issues of educational equity and improved student academic achievement for our nation's students; how to ensure that the Regional Educational Laboratories and the Comprehensive Centers are responsive to the needs of our nation's schools and school districts and help educators and administrators implement evidence-based practices in our nation's classrooms; strategies to encourage innovation in education research; and updates or changes needed for the National Center for Special Education Research."

School support services—such as speech-language pathology—are highly utilized by students served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). According to the Department of Education's (ED) 40th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA, 2018, speech or language impairments represent the most prevalent disability category; indicating 42.6% of children ages 3 through 5 were served under IDEA Part B.¹ In addition, speech or language impairment was the second or third most prevalent disability category for students ages 6 through 21 in every racial/ethnic group served under IDEA Part B.

Amendments Related to the Institute for Education Sciences (IES) and Educational Technical Assistance

Since understanding and production of language represent integral aspects of learning, there must be a greater research emphasis on improved outcomes for students with communication impairments. ASHA encourages the Committee to include further clarity in ESRA's priorities to direct IES and Regional Educational Laboratories to examine issues that directly impact the ability of audiologists and speech-language pathologists (SLPs) to serve students and their families. This should include the impact of excess workloads for audiologists and SLPs on student outcomes. By taking a workload analysis approach to setting caseloads, it would help ensure that students receive services they need to support their educational programs. As we have seen with the impact of COVID-19, it is imperative to have a greater empirical understanding of evidence-based strategies to address these issues to improve student outcomes and social emotional supports.

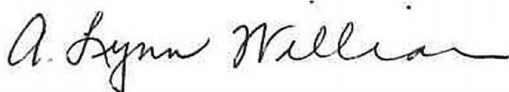
In addition to research focused on workload issues, there are other technical assistance priorities the Committee may consider. ASHA recommends that technical assistance be more robustly focused on 1) caseload management for practitioners, such as audiologists and SLPs; 2) rural capacity building for accessing school-based services for students who already qualify under Medicaid; and 3) school-based telepractice.

How to Build Upon the Improvements Made to ESRA in the Strengthening Education through Research Act (SETRA)

ASHA recommends that the Committee adds conforming definitions to ESRA that reflect the full scope of school community personnel, by adopting the Every Student Succeeds Act's definition of "specialized instructional support personnel," which includes audiologists and SLPs.

ASHA welcomes this opportunity to provide these comments and will provide additional specific legislative recommendations as the Committee considers reauthorization of ESRA. ASHA looks forward to being part of the solution as the Senate works to address these vital issues for all students, including students with disabilities. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Eric Masten, ASHA's director of federal affairs for education, at emasten@asha.org.

Sincerely,



A. Lynn Williams, PhD, CCC-SLP
2021 ASHA President

¹ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs. (2018). *40th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/osep/2018/parts-b-c/40th-arc-for-idea.pdf>.