



Submission to the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes

Please accept this submission by the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (NLASLPA) regarding Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology services in the Newfoundland and Labrador English and French School Districts.

Approximately 35% of our members are employed in the Education system. This submission will advocate, on behalf of those members, for manageable workload/caseload demands, updated guidelines for service delivery, a greater understanding and awareness of the role of an SLP in the Education system, and increased recruitment and retention. Also included in this submission are recommendations to improve SLP service delivery.

What is your specific interest area?

Speech-Language Pathology (SLP) and Audiology Services.

Please note that this submission is based on member feedback and therefore primarily focuses on the role of the SLP; however, NLASLPA would like to acknowledge the role of the Audiologist within Education. There is currently one Educational Audiologist in the province and NLASLPA would like to note that this position is highly valued.

The Educational Audiologist may¹:

- Complete and monitor audiological evaluations and subsequent rehabilitation;
- Manage technology;
- Liaise with the clinical audiologist (i.e. with various Regional Health Authorities);
- Improve educator understanding of the effects of hearing loss on academics and assist them in managing hearing loss in the classroom;
- Manage classroom acoustics to eliminate background noise;
- Train staff on how to properly use Frequency Modulated (FM) systems; and
- Work with educators to ensure appropriate accommodations are in place.

What issue would you like to address?

This submission addresses the role of the SLP and Audiologist within the Education system, with particular emphasis on areas that our members feel are working well, as well as the challenges and concerns they face providing services to students. We also propose some possible solutions to the concerns raised by our Members.

¹ Madell, J (2012). *What Does and Educational Audiologist Do?* Hearing Health and Technology Matters. Available from: <http://hearinghealthmatters.org/hearingandkids/2012/what-does-an-educational-audiologist-do/>



What is the current status of this issue?

SLPs are currently working with a limited scope of practice due to workload and caseload demands. The full scope of practice of an SLP is not well-known by other staff in the Education system, as well as the general public.

What are your suggestions for improvement?

Various recommendations to improve SLP service delivery are presented in this submission. We welcome the opportunity to discuss any or all of the suggested solutions at any time.

Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) and Audiologists in Newfoundland and Labrador are highly educated professionals who have a minimum of a Master's degree in their specialty, and who are required to be registered members of the College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists of Newfoundland and Labrador (CASLP-NL). SLPs have extensive knowledge in anatomy and physiology of the structures used in speech and swallowing, and additionally have training in the fields of human and language development, neuroanatomy, linguistics, psychology, genetics, and acoustics. This makes them qualified to assess, diagnose, and treat a variety of speech, language, and swallowing delays and disorders.²

In 1986, the prevalence of kindergarten students in Canada with a language impairment was approximately 8%.³ In 2011, speech-related disabilities were found to affect about 43.3% of children between the ages of 5 and 14.⁴ It is fair to assume that the prevalence of children with speech-language impairments has risen, as the number of children on SLP caseloads continues to rise. These statistics are important as they highlight children who may be at a disadvantage in school, due to their difficulties with language. This is because language is the basis for learning and the foundation for academics. It is the medium through which teachers teach and students learn. Proficiency in communication and language is key for students to be successful not only in the school curriculum, but also in the vocational and social aspects of their lives throughout their school career, and post-graduation. For example, an understanding of phonology and language rules is essential to learn how to read. Students with language impairments are 4 to 5 times more likely to have reading difficulties.⁵ Additionally, students who have speech and language delays and disorders can have a higher risk of developing social, emotional, and behavioural problems.⁶

² Speech-Language and Audiology Canada. (n.d.). What do speech-language pathologists do? [www page]. <http://www.sac-oac.ca/public/what-do-speech-language-pathologists-do>

³ Beitchman, J. H., Nair, R., Clegg, M., & Patel, P. G. (1986.) Prevalence of speech and language disorders in 5-year-old kindergarten children in the Ottawa-Carleton region. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders*, 51, 98-110.)

⁴ Government of Canada. (2003). Statistics Canada: Profile of disability among children [www page]. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-577-x/4065023-eng.htm>

⁵ Speech-Language and Audiology Canada. (n.d.). Language and literacy skills: Speech-language pathologists can help [pdf document]. http://maymonth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Literacy_info-sheet_EN.pdf

⁶ Alberta Health Services. (2004). Review of speech-language services for children and youth in Alberta: A literature review [pdf document]. <http://www.health.alberta.ca/documents/Speech-LS-Lit-Review-2004.pdf>



SLPs are professionally trained to help with such speech, language, and literacy difficulties, among other communication issues. It is important to acknowledge, however, that student populations can be very diverse: language and speech impairments can occur on their own or comorbidly with other diagnoses (i.e. Autism Spectrum Disorder, learning disabilities, developmental or physical handicaps, behavioural difficulties, and/or hearing impairments). SLPs must, therefore, rely on the combination of their professional training and their clinical judgement to provide the best service delivery to suit their student's needs.

In the Education system, SLPs use assessments to obtain a comprehensive profile of the student's communication abilities and, based on the results of these assessments, provide recommendations to teachers and parents to better help the student. The SLP may choose to provide consultation-only services in collaboration with the student support services team and/or the classroom teacher to provide programming support and/or modify academic programs to meet student's needs. They may also work with parents/caregivers to support the development of the student's communication abilities at home and in the classroom. They may choose one or a combination of service delivery models: treatment outside the classroom (pull-out) and/or in the classroom (push-in), individual and/or in groups. The SLP can work with the teacher to highlight and modify the language components of the classroom to support the communication needs of the student. They can additionally be involved in selecting, demonstrating, and determining effectiveness of special technology to help the student in learning and communicating in the classroom.⁷

The Role of the SLP and Audiologist in Relation to The Task Force

The Premier's Task Force on Improving Education Outcomes has been asked to consider the following nine domains: early learning, mathematics, reading/literacy, inclusive education, student mental health and awareness, multicultural education, cooperative education, indigenous education, and teacher education and professional development. In looking at these domains, it becomes evident how critical the roles of the SLP and Audiologist are to creating a successful education system in this province. The scope of these professions is broad, and when able to practice their full scope, they can have a tremendous positive effect on the education system.

Early Learning

As aforementioned, early speech and language development is the foundation of later academic success. When a student enters kindergarten with below average vocabulary development, they are at-risk of later academic failure.⁸ This is further evidenced by a

⁷Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists. (n.d.). Speech-language pathologists' roles and services: School boards [pdf document]. <https://www.osla.on.ca/uploads/Speech-Language%20Pathologists%20Roles%20and%20Services%20-%20School%20Boards.pdf>

⁸Ryder and Graves 1994: Ryder, R. J., & Graves, M. F. (1994). Vocabulary instruction presented prior to reading in two basal readers. *The Elementary School Journal*, 95, 139-153.



plethora of research, such as Stahl and Fairbanks⁹ that demonstrates that children with a higher vocabulary achieve higher grades. The 30 Million Word Gap study¹⁰ clearly highlights that those from low-income families are far behind their age-matched peers with regard to vocabulary from an early age. Children with language deficits enter school on uneven ground, and we cannot expect them to succeed academically unless they are given the appropriate support. Simply exposing them to new language and concepts when they do not have the basic precursory skills will not be successful. These children need the help of an SLP, who is the expert in language development and is extensively trained to deal with such delays, using evidence-based practice. Research shows that direct intervention with an SLP yields the greatest success¹¹; however, current models of intervention in this province largely only allow for consultation from an SLP. Without appropriate access to SLP services, these children are not given the chance to catch-up, and we can therefore not expect them to meet curriculum standards.

Mathematics

While the role of the SLP may not seem as evident in this area initially, mathematics is in fact filled with language-rich concepts such as size, shape, and spatial concepts (i.e. prepositional terms). Bowker¹² states that "English vocabulary level has been shown to be strongly related to educational success. Vocabulary level is a useful predictor of academic ability, even for courses like Chemistry that do not emphasize language usage" (p 16). A child's success with a mathematics curriculum is therefore directly related to a child's receptive vocabulary and basic concept knowledge, as referenced in the preceding paragraph. Furthermore, as a child progresses through the grades, there is a greater emphasis on reading comprehension through mathematical word problems. Success with reading comprehension requires a strong vocabulary and decoding abilities, which are weaker areas for children with speech and language delays. The SLP's role in reading and literacy is further discussed below.

Reading/Literacy

According to research, 73% of all second-grade students who are identified as poor readers had difficulties with phonemic awareness or spoken language in kindergarten.¹³ A speech and language delay may affect a child's reading and writing skills in the following ways:

⁹Steven A. Stahl, Marilyn M. Fairbanks. (1986). The Effects of Vocabulary Instruction: A Model-Based Meta-Analysis.. Review of Educational Research Vol 56, Issue 1, pp. 72 - 110

¹⁰Hart, B. and Risley. T. (2003). The early catastrophe: The 30 million word gap by age 3. *American Educator*, 27(1), 4 – 9.

¹¹Law, J., Garrett, Z. and Nye, C. (2004). Speech and language therapy interventions for children with primary speech and language delay or disorder. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, 2. Updated 29-May-2003. Retrieved September 16, 2004 from <http://gateway.ut.ovid.com/gw1/ovideb.cgi>

¹²Bowker. (1981).: A study of the effectiveness of Wordbook, the Johnson O'Connor Research Foundation vocabulary building program (Tech. Rep. #1981-1). Boston: Human Engineering Laboratories.

¹³Catts HW, Fey ME, Zhang X, Tomblin JB.(1999). Language basis of reading and reading disabilities: Evidence from a longitudinal investigation. *Scientific Studies of Reading*. 3:331–361.



- Letter-sound relationships;
- Discriminating between sounds;
- Learning sight words; and
- Reading comprehension.

In order for these children to have the foundation to succeed, they need timely intervention. There is an evident domino effect when precursory skills are not in place, making the role of the SLP key to academic success. While there is a push for early intervention through health-based preschool services in this province, it is important to realize that many children continue to enter kindergarten with delayed early literacy skills, secondary to speech and language impairments, and will require direct instruction in order to progress and achieve academically. It is especially important for these children to receive intervention in the early grades, so that in grades 3-4, when the switch from "learning to read" to "reading to learn" occurs, that they are not left behind.¹⁴

Inclusive education

SLPs play a key role in ensuring all students thrive in the classroom. As evidenced by the various public consultations for this task force, the views of various teachers on CBC's "Inside the Classroom", and input from NLASLPA members, it is clear that inclusive education in this province is not working. One key reason why it is failing is the lack of adequate supports, such as SLPs, to support the inclusive model. The education system needs to recognize the skills and expertise the interdisciplinary team brings to the classroom, specifically the SLP. The SLP can work not only directly with children with communication needs, but more effectively train teachers, when given adequate time and resources, to teach these children in more effective ways. In a 2016 Canadian Journal of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology (CJSLPA) survey¹⁵, substantial challenges to successful inclusion included:

- Opportunities to collaborate with educators;
- Time to implement Universal Design for Learning (UDL) activities;
- Administrative support to implement UDL activities; and
- Opportunities for professional development in UDL.

Student Mental Health and Awareness

A student's sense of belonging is key to engagement. They must first feel safe and included in order to be open to learning. The education system must therefore recognize the need for a holistic approach, including mental health, to a student's success.

¹⁴Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010. [www page] <http://www.aecf.org/resources/early-warning-why-reading-by-the-end-of-third-grade-matters/>

¹⁵ Wenonah N. Campbell Enid Selkirk Robin Gaines (2016). Speech Language Pathologists' Role in Inclusive Education: A Survey of Clinicians' Perspectives of Universal Design for Learning. Canadian Journal of Speech Language Pathology and Audiology: v 40 no 2.



Statistics from the 2013 Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network National School Survey¹⁶ regarding the LGBT community clearly demonstrate the prevalence of bullying and disengagement in schools:

- 55.5% of LGBT students felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and 37.8% because of their gender expression;
- 30.3% of LGBT students missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable, and over a tenth (10.6%) missed four or more days in the past month;
- Most reported avoiding school functions and extracurricular activities (68.1% and 61.2%, respectively) because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.

Transgender students are just one example where SLPs can help with bullying, a sense of belonging and increase confidence in communication. With this population, SLPs may work with students in the following areas:

- Speech (i.e. voice, pitch, resonance);
- Language (i.e. pragmatics); and
- Non-verbal communication (i.e. gestures, facial expressions).

According to the 2013 survey¹⁷, when LGBT students were adequately supported, their engagement in the school system improved. Similar results can be seen for students with various other speech and language impairments (i.e. speech sound disorders, stuttering, hearing loss and social challenges) that outwardly present themselves. These differences lead to disengagement and the school must play a key role in providing the correct supports so that these students can succeed.

Multicultural Education

Diversity in the classroom demands that educators provide culturally competent services. These services, once again, must look at the child holistically. For this reason, SLPs play a key role in the successful transition of English Language Learners through the grades. As language is the foundation to academics, it is important that these children are appropriately assessed and supported. "Language disorders" versus "language differences" must be appropriately identified in order for appropriate assessment and intervention to be provided, and for accurate conclusions on students' academic performance to be drawn.¹⁸ SLPs are an integral member of the student support team, working directly with students, as well as providing additional training to other team members on how to best support English Language Learners. As various regions in the province currently find themselves supporting Syrian refugees, the need for SLP expertise is evident.

¹⁶ Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Palmer, N. A., & Boesen, M. J. (2014). *The 2013 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN.

¹⁷ Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Palmer, N. A., & Boesen, M. J. (2014). *The 2013 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN.

¹⁸ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2010). *Roles and responsibilities of speech-language pathologists in schools* [Professional Issues Statement]. Available from www.asha.org/policy.



Cooperative Education

An education must provide students with the skills to succeed, not only in the classroom but in life. Students must be prepared for the work force so as to avoid “the cliff” post graduation. Cooperative Education provides students with the opportunity to gain “real-life” work experience, and for students with disabilities, this means they will need additional supports to gain meaningful and positive experiences from such opportunities. As per Levinson and Palmer (2005)¹⁹, “Broad-based knowledge and skills are good, but for some students with disabilities, specific skills are necessary for survival in the workplace and in the community and need to be explicitly taught” (p 13).

SLPs can help prepare students by providing individualized intervention plans that focus on practical skills such as:

- Functional reading comprehension;
- Written correspondence (i.e. email);
- Code-switching (using different types of language dependant on the setting/persons involved);
- How to repair communication breakdowns;
- Self-advocacy strategies for successful communication; and
- Interview skills.

Indigenous Education

As discussed above in Multicultural Education, the need for culturally competent services is equally relevant for the indigenous population, as evidenced through our members’ experiences with the Innu and Inuit of Labrador. As these populations may not speak English and/or French as their first language (the languages of instruction), the SLP is once again critical in order to determine a language delay from a language difference, and how this impacts academic achievement. Furthermore, in a 2008 study²⁰, language problems were identified as the number one need for the selected Aboriginal populations. In addition, the prevalence of hearing loss in this population puts students at further risk of language delay and poor academic outcomes. This was best described by the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (CASLPA) 2010^{21 22} as “a process of disengagement whereby hearing-impaired youth who experience language delays cannot keep up with what teachers say and simply switch off” (p 31). The role of the SLP and Audiologist is critical for students in this population that experience hearing loss, language delays, and/or language differences.

¹⁹ Levinson, E. and Palmer, E. (2005). Preparing Students With Disabilities for School-to-Work Transition and Postschool Life [pdf document] <https://my.vanderbilt.edu/specialeducationinduction/files/2011/09/Transition-Planning1.pdf>

²⁰ Canadian Association of Speech Language and Audiology Speech (CASLPA). (2010), Language and Hearing Services to First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children in Canada, with a Focus on Children 0 to 6 Years of Age. [pdf document] <http://www.sac-oac.ca/sites/default/files/resources/Complete%20report%20-%20English.pdf>

²¹ Ibid

²² It is important to note that CASLPA has recently been rebranded as Speech-Language Audiology Canada (SAC).



Teacher Education and Professional Development

SLPs and Audiologists require access to quality continuing education opportunities in order to provide evidence-based assessment and programming. Maintaining clinical competency across a wide range of areas ensures effective practice and in turn, provides further opportunities for SLPs and Audiologists to share their knowledge base with all members of the student support team. As it currently stands, there exists a discrepancy between education support for teachers and SLPs: Teachers are supported through access to appropriate education opportunities through the Department of Education, while SLPs are not. SLPs must then independently seek and at times, fund, education opportunities. As SLPs are regulated professionals and are required to meet standards for continuing education, coupled with the fact that maintaining licensure is a condition of employment, the Department of Education must now be equally committed to the continuing education of SLPs.

More importantly, the education system needs to build their understanding of the role of the SLP and Audiologist. As it currently stands, there is a disconnect between our professionals and the education system. Much work needs to be done to rectify this so that a mutual respect for the roles of all educators is obtained through an interdisciplinary team that is truly understood and collaborative.

NLASLPA Member Advocacy

Members were given the opportunity to share their experiences, suggestions, and solutions during teleconference calls and through an online survey circulated to the membership. The following is a summary of the information collected through these two avenues, as provided by our members in the Education system.

Positive Aspects

The primary positive comment from our Members in the Education system is that their students continue to be motivated. They also highly appreciate their professional relationships and their collaboration with coworkers; the administrative support, and the student support services team.

Our members appreciate their ability to choose the service delivery model(s) they feel, in their professional opinion, would be best practice for the child (i.e. individual session, home programming, etc.). They explain that this is particularly important due to the large number of children they see and the differences in needs both within and across schools. In fact, a survey of Canadian school-based SLPs found that 81% use more than one service delivery model.²³

Members discussed the benefit of the Student Support Services Team to help the student support team be more effective and efficient. The committee examines the referral

²³ Vision Research. (2003 December). 2003 Caseload Guidelines Survey Final Report for Speech-Language Pathology. Prepared for Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists.



to determine the appropriateness of evaluation for each profession, determines the order of the assessment(s), and ensures that all required documentation is completed before the evaluation begins.

Concerns

Our Members brought forward various issues and challenges they face working in the Education system. Large workload/caseload sizes, the need for updated guidelines, a lack of awareness of the SLP's scope of practice by other education staff members, and the need for recruitment and retention are discussed below.

Workload/Caseload Sizes

The primary concern among Members in the Education system is the large caseloads and workloads they undertake. Many members explain that they find they are providing a 'band-aid' service, and that it is difficult to provide services as they were professionally trained due to the high number of children to be seen during the workday.

These large caseloads also affect student services with respect to the type of service delivery model used. Larger caseloads lend to the use of more group therapy sessions in an effort to ensure the maximum number of students receive services.²⁴ Although Law, Garrett & Nye²⁵ report that studies found generally no difference between the effectiveness of 1:1 and group therapy, an increase in group therapy sessions often means that the sessions are less individualized for the student. This is troublesome because students on large caseloads tend to take longer to make progress on communication skills.²⁶

Members also explained that they fear for their safety in that they have been kicked and punched by students while providing services. Many of our members feel this is due to the children having difficulty regulating themselves in a classroom and are not getting the services they need to help them adapt. A lack of various services, including SLP intervention, appropriate space, and personnel (i.e. student assistants) seems to be a driving force in these type of safety situations.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) developed a National Outcomes Measurement System (NOMS) to determine effectiveness of school-based SLP

²⁴ Cirrin, F., Bird, A., Biehl, L., Disney, S., Estomin, E., Rudebusch, J., Schraeder, T. and Whitmire, K. (2003). Speech-language caseloads in the schools: a workload analysis approach to setting caseload standards. *Seminars in Speech and Language*, 24(3), 155-80.

²⁵ Law, J., Garrett, Z. and Nye, C. (2004). Speech and language therapy interventions for children with primary speech and language delay or disorder. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 2. Updated 29-May-2003. Retrieved September 16, 2004 from <http://gateway.ut.ovid.com/gw1/ovideb.cgi>

²⁶ Cirrin, F., Bird, A., Biehl, L., Disney, S., Estomin, E., Rudebusch, J., Schraeder, T. and Whitmire, K. (2003). Speech-language caseloads in the schools: a workload analysis approach to setting caseload standards. *Seminars in Speech and Language*, 24(3), 155-80.



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services.²⁷ Several analyses of data from the NOMS database show that the perceived effectiveness of SLP services is directly correlated to caseload size; as caseload size increases, the teacher's perception of the effectiveness SLP pull-out therapy decreases. Cirrin et al.²⁸ found that when caseload size is less than 40 students for SLPs in a Kindergarten to Grade 12 system, 87% of kids make measurable progress on speech sound production. However, when the caseload is larger than 60 students, only 64% of kids make gains. Schooling²⁹ reports that when a SLP caseload is less than 40 students, 90% of teachers said the students showed improved pre-reading, reading, or reading comprehension skills. When caseload was between 50-59 students, 73% of teachers said there was improvement. When caseload was 70 students or greater, only 60% of teachers found there were improved reading skills.

ASHA's 1993 guidelines for caseload size recommends a caseload of 40 students for a school-based SLPs, no matter the type or number of service delivery model used. They do note however, that caseloads comprised of special populations may necessitate fewer students.³⁰ In our recent survey, members indicated their caseloads ranged from 40-200 students. Most respondents noted their caseloads were between 70-90 students while 5 members noted their caseloads were 100 students or more (110, 162, 140, 200).

It is important, however, to note that the SLP caseload is only part of the SLP workload. An SLP in the Education system is also responsible for: conducting evaluations, writing assessment reports, chart noting, participating in multidisciplinary groups, conferring with families, completing documentation, participating in continuing education, as well as other activities as employees or consultants.³¹ In fact, our members that completed the survey explain that they spend 20-50% of their time in consultation, as compared to direct services to the student. Additionally, due to the geography of Newfoundland and Labrador, some SLPs in the Education system have to travel great distances to service their schools. This time spent traveling directly takes away time that could be spent providing services to the students. Comments from our survey show that most Members spend anywhere from 2-4 hours traveling for work per week. One member even brought forward that when she has to fly to her various communities she services, she loses two work days to travel. These are valuable hours that could be spent providing services to students.

²⁷ Schooling, T. (2003). Lessons from the National Outcomes Measurement System (NOMS). *Seminars in Speech and Language*, 24(3), 245-256.

²⁸ Cirrin, F., Bird, A., Biehl, L., Disney, S., Estomin, E., Rudebusch, J., Schraeder, T. and Whitmire, K. (2003). Speech-language caseloads in the schools: a workload analysis approach to setting caseload standards. *Seminars in Speech and Language*, 24(3), 155-80.

²⁹ Schooling, T. C. (2003). Lessons from the National Outcomes Measurement System (NOMS). *Seminars in Speech and Language*, 24(3), 245-56.

³⁰ American Speech-Language and Hearing Association (1993, March). Guidelines for Caseload Size and Speech-Language Pathology Delivery in the Schools. *ASHA*, 35(suppl.10), 33-39. Rockville MD: Author.

³¹ Cirrin, F., Bird, A., Biehl, L., Disney, S., Estomin, E., Rudebusch, J., Schraeder, T. and Whitmire, K. (2003). Speech-language caseloads in the schools: a workload analysis approach to setting caseload standards. *Seminars in Speech and Language*, 24(3), 155-80.



Guidelines

Another important issue our members brought forward is the lack of updated guidelines with respect to workload sizes for the Education-based SLP. Without such guidelines, it is difficult to establish a priority system (i.e. frequency of services, length of services, etc.) for the students that need SLP services both within and across schools. This, in turn, makes it impossible to have uniform and comparable workloads for SLPs in the Education system. Members, students, and families are finding significant differences between regions with respect to what services are offered and how those services are offered. This lack of updated guidelines has further reaching consequences in that our members report there is a disconnect between services received in the Healthcare system with those the child will be or is currently receiving from in the Education system. This change in services is not only difficult for the family to understand, but extremely difficult for the child who is entering a new environment with new expectations placed upon them. This sort of transition is challenging enough for any child, and even more so for children with speech-language needs.

Lack of Understanding of the SLP's Scope of Practice

Wright & Kersner³² found all teachers believe collaboration between SLPs and teachers is important. This importance of collaboration was outlined in a study by Throneburg et al.³³ that found a combination of SLP/teacher collaboration, team-teaching, and pull-out intervention was the most effective service delivery model (compared to classroom-based interventions with SLP or teacher independent teaching, or pull-out interventions). It is important to note that gains were also noted for children that did not qualify for SLP services. The results of this study support the importance of teacher/SLP collaboration for all children, not only those with speech-language needs. The benefits of teacher/SLP collaboration are also felt by teachers as well. Various studies found classroom-based intervention increased awareness of communication difficulties and increased the teacher's confidence in a referral to SLP.^{34 35}

While these studies suggest that teacher/SLP collaboration is beneficial for both the teacher and the students involved, our members explain they feel there is a definite lack of awareness of the role of the SLP by other staff in the Educational system and the valuable services, information, and/or help they can provide. This further translates into a lack of adequate space and resources for therapy. As a result, student privacy and confidentiality are not being properly considered. Many members feel the priority is placed on evaluations

³² Wright, J.A. and Kersner, M. (December 1999). Teachers and speech and language therapist working with children with physical disabilities: implications for inclusive education. *British Journal of Special Education*, 26(4), 201-5.

³³ Throneburg, R. N. et al (2000). A comparison of service delivery models: effects on curricular vocabulary skills in the school setting. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 9, 10-20.

³⁴ Wren, Y., Roulstone, S., Parkhouse, J. and Hall, B. (2001). A model for a mainstream school-based speech and language therapy service. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 17(2), 107-26.

³⁵ Cleary, P. and McFadden S. (2002). Helping children with difficulties in the classroom. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 36 (supplemental), 104-9.



and assessments instead of the importance of SLP intervention to help with student programming.

Recruitment and Retention

The final concerns our membership raised are with respect to recruitment and retention. There is a need for more SLP positions in the Education system, to adequately serve the growing number of students that need SLP intervention. To quote an SLP who currently works in the private sector: "that there are so many private SLPs is a testament to the services that SLPs give in schools."

Solutions

Our Members have brainstormed some possible solutions to their key concerns outlined above. We would be happy to further discuss any and all of the proposed solutions listed below.

- Updated guidelines for uniformity in frequency, amount, and type of services.

The use of guidelines would help obtain uniformity and comparisons within and across schools with respect to services provided to students and caseload sizes. The establishment of these guidelines would also help children and families with the transition between the health and education systems.

- The Student Support Services Team.

The Student Support Services Team is beneficial in streamlining student evaluations thereby decreasing the number of inappropriate referrals to SLP and freeing valuable time for student programming. It is also beneficial for students that require SLP services, as a more effective intake system also reduces wait times.

While there exists a Student Services Delivery Team through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, consideration must be given to the SLP's role in this pre-referral process. Through our consultations with membership, it did not seem evident that members were familiar with the intake process and how referrals were in fact screened. It appears that members feel this process could still be streamlined, potentially through greater SLP involvement.

- Increased Awareness of the SLP and Audiologist Scope of Practice.

Many of the concerns brought forward by the Members stemmed from a lack of awareness by other staff in the education system, as well as the general public, of the SLP's role in many aspects including scope of practice and the need for adequate space and resources to properly provide interventions. Increased public and professional awareness would be beneficial to this end.



- Increased Recruitment and Retention

Adding additional SLP positions in the Education system would help service the large number of students needing SLP services. Return to service contracts would help with retention in certain areas of the province that struggle with high turn-over.

- Collaboration with Communication Health Assistants

Having trained Communication Health Assistants (Communication Disorder Assistants) may be a great asset to help offset the need for SLP services. We are aware, however, that in rural areas, it may be hard to recruit for that position. Training local professionals may lead to better retention in those settings.

It is important to note, however, that even with the use of these support personnel, the need for adequate resources would still exist (i.e. therapy space, equipment, personnel, etc.). Additional issues such as: regulation, SLP: assistant ratio, and supervision would also need to be addressed.

The possibility of a pilot project with respect to the implementation of assistants in certain areas of the province was discussed among the Membership. We recognize, however, that this such project would require a lot of coordination and organization before implementation.

- Tele-therapy as a Service Delivery Model

One possible solution to reduce travel time and workload constraints would be the use of tele-therapy. We recognize that this does come with restrictions, including but not limited to: the suitability of this service delivery model for certain populations, the need for student supervision at the second site, the necessary electronic equipment, etc. It is imperative that the connection provide clear sound and video; a lack of either would be detrimental to the services provided to the student. Tele-therapy could be a tool in service-delivery, however, it is not a complete solution.

Conclusion

NLASLPA would like to take this opportunity to thank you for reviewing our submission. Our Executive team is open to working with the Department of Education in order to improve the current state of SLP and Audiology services in the education system. While we recognize the large breadth of this task force, we hope this submission helped to highlight how critical our professions are to the successful educational outcomes of students, and to the training and education of all educators in this province.