



MINNESOTA SPEECH-LANGUAGE-HEARING ASSOCIATION

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Role Definition of School Based Speech-Language Pathology

The purpose of this memo is to clarify the appropriate licensure necessary for individuals providing speech and language services in the schools. It has come to our attention both anecdotally and via on-site monitoring that a growing number of districts are utilizing special education teachers to provide special education speech and language services. While MDE is sensitive to the reality that speech-language pathologists are at a shortage in many areas of the state, using teachers or paraprofessionals to act as speech-language pathologists to provide services to children who meet state eligibility for articulation, fluency, voice or language disorders is not in compliance with federal and state laws and rules. Speech-language pathology is both a stand alone and a related special education service.

The scope of speech-language pathology addresses articulation, fluency, voice, and language disorders. Services to address these categorical areas of communication are highly specialized services and **must** be provided **only** by appropriately trained and licensed speech-language pathologists. In addition, speech-language pathologists are licensed to provide speech-language services; they are **not** licensed to teach. The Board of Teaching education license for speech-language pathology authorizes individuals who hold this license to provide speech-language services in the schools. Individuals who hold this highly specialized license may provide these services in collaboration with a classroom teacher in a variety of models; however they are not licensed to independently teach a class for credit or grade.

Services to address a language disorder are dependent upon the extent to which the language disorder is impacting the student's ability to participate in the educational setting. Students who meet the state criteria for a language disorder (including a score that is -2 standard deviations below the mean on two nationally normed language tests) **exhibit a severe impairment in the development of language for learning**. For these children, whose primary disability is speech-language, services to address the disability **must** be provided by a properly trained and licensed speech-language pathologist. Services provided by speech-language pathologists differ from services provided by special education teachers. Speech-language pathologists are uniquely and specifically trained in the use of highly specialized techniques and specific language supports which target the acquisition of a strategy and/or skill designed to further develop the oral/spoken language system. For students who meet the State of Minnesota eligibility criteria to receive special education services as a student with speech-language impairment, with or without identification of other areas of disability, (e.g. Specific Learning Disability), service, direct and/or indirect, **must be provided by a trained and licensed speech-language pathologist**.

Children may exhibit significant educational needs in the areas of speech, language, and communication related to their primary disability area but do not necessarily meet the state eligibility as a student with specific speech-language impairment. Disabilities that may impact language and communication skills development include but are not limited to: Developmental Cognitive Disabilities, Deaf or Hard of Hearing, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Learning Disabilities, and Developmental Delay. Students' IEP teams may or may not determine that the spoken language/communication skills development of students is significantly impacted by their primary disability and the IEP team may or may not decide to employ the professional skills of a speech-

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language pathologist as a related service provider to address the communication development goals and objectives in the IEP. In these cases, speech-language pathology is a related service. When children are eligible for only speech-language special education services these children do not receive instruction or other services from a special education teacher. More specifically, learning disabilities (LD) service is not a related service for speech language services and a student with only a diagnosis of speech-language disorder is eligible only for speech-language services provided by the speech-language pathologist.

The Board of Teaching issues licenses for speech-language pathology to individuals who have completed a Master's Degree in speech-language pathology or communication disorders from a preparation program accredited by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). The Board of Teaching does not accredit or approve these preparation programs; therefore the Board does not have authority to waive requirements for this preparation. When the district is unable to fill a position with a fully licensed speech-language pathologist, the Board has authority to grant a limited license (one year at a time, but not more than three) to an individual who has completed a bachelor's degree in speech-language pathology or communication disorders.

In cases of severe professional shortages, only related language services (not primary disability services and not articulation, voice, or fluency services) may be provided for a limited time, on a case by case basis, by an appropriately trained assistant or a licensed teacher with the appropriate training. This training must include knowledge and skills related to normal and abnormal or delayed language acquisition. This temporary service provider may not assess, write the IEP goals, or document progress in the IEP. This temporary position must be routinely and adequately supervised by a licensed speech-language pathologist and this supervision must include documented direct onsite supervision. Districts should also document ongoing efforts to locate and hire an appropriately licensed speech-language pathologist to fill these positions in a timely manner. It is the responsibility of the district to make every attempt to locate and hire a qualified and licensed speech-language pathologist. When not successful, the district may need to contact local hospital and health care staffing groups to assist with these needs.

In summary, speech-language pathology services are highly specialized, individualized special education services. The most appropriate person to provide these services is the appropriately licensed and trained speech-language pathologist. Personnel shortages are a state and national issue but do not relieve the district from hiring or making ongoing documented attempts to hire fully licensed speech-language pathologists while using appropriate alternate service delivery options for short periods of time.