

Ten Ideas for How Schools Can Use a Speech-Language Pathology Assistant

Speech Language Pathology Assistants can be used to improve and expand the scope of speech-language services available to students in Missouri schools. The following ten ideas are offered in hopes of stimulating discussions in all Missouri schools -- large and small, urban and rural, wealthy and poor – about how a Speech Language Pathology Assistant could enhance the quality of services you are able to provide for your students.

1. Speech-Language Pathology Assistants (SLP-As) have been used extensively in early childhood and early childhood special education programs to provide inclusive speech-language services. After the SLP develops the intervention plan, the SLP-A is able to implement it within the early childhood or early childhood special education setting using a collaborative approach that infuses the intervention into the early childhood developmental activities.
2. Many schools have effectively used SLP-As to provide bilingual speech-language services to their students. In many cases, the school identified an individual who was bilingual, already had a Bachelor's degree, and was willing/able to obtain the coursework necessary to become a credentialed SLP-A. These individuals can provide a critical combination of skill sets (bilingual language expertise coupled with training as an SLP-A) to a school and can implement SLP designed intervention plans through bilingual interactions. They can also be invaluable in supporting valid assessments of students who are English language learners.
3. Speech-Language Pathology Assistants (SLP-As) have been used in secondary school settings where students have received direct intervention services in previous school years and are at a maintenance level or transferring skills to new settings. Usually an SLP-A can be present in the building more often which allows them to be more integrated into the building activities and able to better support skill maintenance, generalization and transference within that environment.
4. Many schools have utilized SLP-As to provide intensive, highly specialized services for individual students such as those who use complex speech generating communication devices or unique manual communication systems like cued speech. Providing speech language services to meet these unique needs may require extensive specialized training and significant time devoted to a single student which can be efficiently delivered using an SLP-A. As with bilingual services, it is also possible to identify an individual who already has background in these areas (e.g. in technology) and is willing/able to obtain an SLP-A credential.
5. In general, using SLP-A's can reduce the size of groups of students who are receiving services and can provide the SLP with more time to focus on intensive intervention for students who need it with the SLP-A delivering ongoing services to other students. It allows the schools and SLP to better tailor the intensity of services to meet individual student needs.

6. Many Missouri schools are providing regular education speech-language improvement services (sometimes as part of a response-to-intervention approach) designed to intervene and ameliorate problems before the student requires special education services. SLP-As can provide these types of regular education improvement services and a district may be able to expand their speech-language improvement activities and potentially reduce the overall need for special education in the district.
7. Special Education Cooperatives or districts who currently share a SLP could efficiently use SLP-As to ensure comprehensive services are available to all students in their district. Since one SLP can supervise three SLP-As, this arrangement could allow schools in rural areas to expand the level of services available to students.
8. Schools who have found the need to use Speech Implementers should consider the using an SLP-A instead of hiring an Implementer in the future. Hiring an SLP-A requires no annual request for approval from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education or additional steps to justify the position. A school does not need to experience a shortage or be unable to hire an SLP to use an SLP-A. And since the SLP-A is a permanent service delivery option; districts can attract and keep SLP-As for longer periods of time (versus a Speech Implementer with a teaching certificate who may return to a teaching position).

The SLP-A has specific academic coursework and practical preparation in speech language pathology. A Speech Implementer has a teaching certificate that is not in a related content area and may not have specific academic coursework and practical experiences in speech language pathology.

9. Schools can use SLP-As to ensure continuity of services across all buildings throughout the school year by having them fill-in during short or longer term SLP absences such as maternity leave, other medical leave, bereavement leave, professional development days, or even for days in which the SLP is required to do extra testing. Using an SLP-A to deliver services during the absence of an SLP can be effective and less costly than scheduling "make-up" service time. The continuity of service can contribute to positive student outcomes.
10. Some SLP Assistants will be interested in pursuing a career as an SLP. If a school has an SLP-A with ties to the community (who is likely to stay and work for the district long-term) having that person complete their Master's degree and become a licensed SLP can provide a long-term benefit for the school and the community. While not all SLP Assistants are interested in making this kind of career move, it is one that schools can support if the SLP-A is considering such advancement.

*This document was prepared collaboratively by –
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