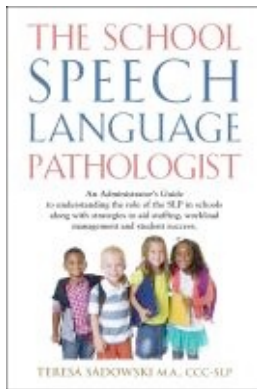


THE SCHOOL SPEECH LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST

An Administrator's Guide
to understanding the role of the SLP in schools
along with strategies to aid staffing, workload
management and student success.



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The School Speech Language Pathologist is an Administrator's Guide to understanding the role of the SLP in schools along with strategies to aid staffing, workload management and student success. A SLP's role in schools is quite diverse and often under utilized. The School Speech Language Pathologist was written to help demystify the role of the Speech Language Pathologist in the school setting and to foster more efficient Speech and Language services in schools.

The School Speech Pathologist

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Teresa Sadowski M.A., CCC-SLP

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Introduction

The idea for this project came out of the need to better explain the role and responsibilities of the Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) within the school setting. During the past year three different administrators, not related to my work situation, asked me about appropriate SLP staffing for different school settings. These administrators wanted a specific caseload number, which I told them was impossible to give because “workload” and “caseload” are two completely different concepts. A caseload of 30 articulation students is going to create a very different "workload" versus a caseload of 30 language delayed or significantly handicapped students.

Many SLPs are providing services in schools with unmanageable caseloads. They frequently report having to cancel direct services because of other required duties (directly related to speech and language or school specific). With only a handful of SLPs in most school districts and usually only one SLP in a school, the SLPs usually do not have enough influence to effect change.

When classroom size exceeds common sense, teachers have avenues to effect change, such as unions and parental input. In many cases even the media gets involved. Yet when speech and language caseloads grow beyond realistic expectations, SLPs are often left to sink. Our own professional group acknowledges the existence of the caseload vs. workload issue. However, it is difficult for The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) to take a firm stance on the issue of caseload size because every district and every school has its own unique population and needs.

There are many factors that contribute to the inappropriate staffing of SLPs. Colleges do not appear to be graduating enough SLPs to fill the current needs, school budgets always play a part and the role of the SLP is often misunderstood. The shortage of SLPs in schools, whatever the reason, can lead to proactive and creative solutions. However, more often than not

the rest of the SLPs in the system are asked to absorb more students and see students in larger groups. While this solution looks good on paper, adding more students to an SLP's caseload just ends up taking away intensive and necessary services from other students.

Views expressed in this booklet are my opinion and based on my experiences over a 30-year career, working or consulting in eight different school districts under many different administrations. Over the years, I've also heard the concerns and opinions expressed by other speech language pathologists, teachers, administrators and parents I've worked with. Through my blog *The School Speech Therapist*, I have received feedback about the caseload vs. workload issue from overwhelmed and overworked Speech Language Pathologists across the country, most of whom still love their career choice.

During my career the field of Speech Language Pathology has evolved. The work I do now is more technical and more in-depth. I've seen caseload numbers grow considerably for a variety of reasons. With an increased caseload came an increased workload. However, staffing levels have not increased significantly since I began working in the mid 1980s.

The examples in this booklet are based on a full time caseload of 30 students. 30 students is a very **low** number. Based on comments I've received through my blog, many full time Speech Language Pathologists carry a caseload of anywhere from 40-60+ students. I've had many SLPs report caseloads higher than 80.

Role of the SLP in the Schools

SLPs do not effectively explain their role in schools. Administrators and teachers, who have worked with SLPs for years, often continue to believe that the SLPs primary role is to work on articulation skills. The role of the SLP in the schools is actually quite diverse and crosses both medical and educational disciplines. SLPs are developmental experts and have to know how to address the needs of clients from birth through adulthood. Speech and language development is extremely complicated, sequential and neurologically based.

Since language disabilities are neurologically based most of the Speech Language Pathologist's training falls under a medical model. After completing a two year masters degree program, SLPs are qualified to work in a variety of settings such as hospitals, rehabs, private practices, residential placements, clinics and in schools. There are many different paths SLPs can take and at the end of our training we are prepared to take all of them. The goals SLPs set for their clients, no matter what age, disability or setting, are solely based on the client's specific needs. Within the school setting one of our basic goals is to teach, strengthen or remediate underlying speech and language skills so that students are able to develop the skills needed to independently access, understand and interact with the school curriculum.

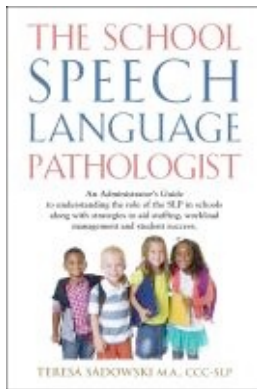
Speech and language skills are also life skills. SLPs are obligated to make sure students acquire the speech and language skills needed to function in the world. Without strong receptive, expressive and pragmatic language abilities, students will struggle to succeed in college and in the work place. Poor language abilities and understanding can even affect personal relationships.

For most children speech and language skills are acquired in a typical naturalistic manner and fall within an expected range of development. For those students who demonstrate developmental language disabilities, moderate/severe language

disabilities or learning disabilities (whatever the underlying cause), school can be especially challenging, confusing, frustrating and just plain difficult.

The American Speech Hearing and Language Association (ASHA) has published a Professional Issue Statement, outlining their policy on the “Roles and Responsibilities of Speech Language Pathologists in Schools”. This statement covers the basics of the role of the SLP. However, does not explain all that SLPs do or who SLPs work within the school setting. <http://www.asha.org/policy/PI2010-00317.htm>

On the following pages you will find three lists. The first list focuses on the speech and language areas SLPs might address in a school setting, the second focuses on the specific types of students SLPs would service in a school setting and the third focuses on the major responsibilities of SLPs in the school setting. These lists are not comprehensive because the scope of the SLP’s practice is so diverse. To list all the disabilities that result in atypical receptive, expressive and pragmatic language development and skills would be impossible.



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