

Ohio Board of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology

Back to School Blues? Not Necessarily! - submitted by Lisa A. Froehlich, Ph.D., CCC-SLP – Speech-Language Pathology Board Member

I saw my first back-to-school commercial on television today. You know, the Staples commercial where the downtrodden children walk gloomily through the brightly lit back-to-school aisle as parents joyfully leap down the same aisle. Admit it, you share similar feelings as these children when the signs of summer begin to fade and are replaced with images of fall. However, there is always a beacon of hope emerging to the service as you realize a new school year means a new start for many students and the possibilities of what can be accomplished are endless. Here are just a few points to ponder as you hang up your swimsuits, dust off your planners and put on your new school shoes.



- Our work is important. Our understanding of how language impacts every aspect of a student's day: learning, discussing, socializing, communicating, writing, reading, negotiating, reporting; is knowledge that no one else in the building understands. Feel empowered as you embrace this fact and realize you have what it takes to advocate for every single student with learning difficulties. Don't ever overlook an opportunity to teach other educators about what we know and how our knowledge is important to help ensure the success of the students. You are important.
- Don't begrudge going to meetings. There are numerous ones. This is a sign that you are a valid member of a team that is helping a child succeed in school, which ultimately shapes the child's future and contributes to his/her successes. Think about what a gift that is. As Dr. Maya Angelou says, "Be A Rainbow in Somebody Else's Cloud". Each student's meeting should be approached differently because each student is different. Our information is vital to explain why the child is having difficulty and what we, as a team, are going to do to support the child. Our information is an important piece of the puzzle that alleviates the worries of parents and lets them know that yes their child learns differently, but he/she will learn. Be a Rainbow.
- Be a vital member of the school community. Schools offer a glorious work environment. Leave your small office and embrace being a member of this very special community. . Sometimes SLPs report feeling isolated in a building. It is important to make yourself known. This next sentence may lose many of you but I am going to put it out there anyway. Do more than you are asked to do. Start a book club for struggling readers during your lunch time. Form a mentoring group for students with behavior difficulties. Plan performance feedback meetings to discuss student progress. Go into a difficult class to support a teacher. Provide a language enrichment class for ESL students. I have done all of these things while providing services to 80 students on my workload. The rewards are numerous. I showed the teachers and administrators that I was a valuable member of the community. Every student in the building saw me as an important part of their education, and every parent respected my knowledge. Trust me, more work is not always bad.
- Know that people do care about you. Although it doesn't always feel like it, the "higher-ups" do care about you. It is easy to feel isolated and unsupported because oftentimes, we are alone in buildings, and it is difficult to network with other SLPs. One of my biggest realizations, after joining the Board, was the fact that people are aware of our work and appreciate what we do for students. I have worked on several committees filled with members of organizations, Boards, school districts and agencies.

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Everyone is concerned with our workload and what needs to be done to support SLPs in the schools. Sometimes it is hard to see change, and it is very frustrating because change takes time. Rest assured there is dialogue happening and this dialogue will lead to changes that will support you and the valuable work you do in the schools.

Almost 27 years ago, I received a piece of paper announcing to the world that I was a speech language pathologist. I have celebrated 26 first days of school. It hasn't always been easy, but looking back, there have been more rewarding, positive experiences than negative ones. The middle of August is approaching quickly. Enjoy your last few weeks of summer and begin preparing for a new school year. It is going to be a great one because you make a difference in the lives of so many. Don't be too sad about the end of summer. I heard the weatherman report that it is going to be a bad winter. You know what that means? Snow days!