

Ohio Board of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology

Survey Provides Critical Insight Into SLP School Work Setting

In July of 2014, the Board invited school-based speech-language pathologists (SLPs) to complete a survey regarding their caseload and service delivery model. The survey was developed by two board members, Linda L. Wellman, Ph.D., CCC-SLP and Lisa A. Froehlich, Ph.D., CCC-SLP. Drs. Wellman and Froehlich have extensive experience in the school setting, and are using their knowledge and expertise to move the Board forward in addressing school-based issues being reported by our licensees.



Board Chairperson Amy Thorpe Wiley recently noted that the role of the licensure board is focused on consumer protection. However, issues and concerns that impact the quality of service consumers must receive do not always come from the people our licensees serve. We also have a duty to listen and understand issues from the licensee's perspective. A good example is the survey Drs. Wellman and Froehlich developed on caseloads and service delivery models for school-based SLPs. Dr. Wellman indicated that there is definitely an opportunity for the licensure board to address issues and concerns being reported by our licensees. Reports showed that high caseloads are impacting the ability of licensees to provide quality services to students when the workload determination process is not being appropriately followed by school districts. She stated, "When we hear of situations like that, the Board has both a duty and obligation to pay attention and address any concerns for the consumers we're here to protect. In this case, our licensees are the ones who are raising the concerns."

At the time the survey closed, there were approximately 6,500 licensed SLPs, with roughly 48% identifying themselves as practicing in a school setting, which equates to approximately 3,100 practitioners. The survey was open for an extended time, which included our license renewal period. Between July 2014 and January 2015, the Board received 738 completed surveys, which is close to a 24% response rate. We would be happy to schedule a meeting to discuss the survey results in more detail, but one area we would like to call to your attention relates to feedback licensees shared about other aspects of working conditions in their school setting. Out of 302 respondents who commented to an open ended question at the end of the survey, 155 respondents (51.3%) wrote statements regarding caseloads. Fifty-four respondents (17.8%) wrote statements regarding high caseloads adversely affecting the quality of services. Eighty-seven respondents (28.8%) wrote comments relating to the amount of mandated paperwork associated with caseloads adversely affecting the quality of services.

Dr. Wellman took the lead in organizing and analyzing the data. She noted that it is clear from these results that high caseloads are of utmost concern. It is well documented that high caseloads can have an adverse impact to the quality of services licensees are required to provide under local, state, and federal regulations. This is precisely why it is important that every school-based practitioner licensed by our board be using the workload determination process that is required by ODE's rule.

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You cannot determine an appropriate caseload number without appropriately implementing the workload determination process; it must come first in the process. And when the workload determination process is appropriately implemented, we believe that licensees will be able to meet the documented needs of every student on their caseload.

The Board acknowledges that school-based practitioners are dedicated to providing the highest level of quality services, despite the challenges and lack of support and resources many face in their workplace, as supported by the survey results. Dr. Wellman will be presenting all of the findings from the survey at the Ohio School Speech Pathology Educational Audiology Coalition's (OSSPEAC) annual conference in Columbus on October 12, 2015. Our findings will subsequently be made available via our newsletter and website. Additionally on October 11th, Dr. Chuck Carlin, CCC-SLP will be presenting on the workload approach. The title of his presentation is called, "***The Workload Approach: It's not Optional in Ohio!***" The title of Dr. Carlin's presentation underscores what everyone needs to know about the workload determination process—it's not optional, but required under ODE's rule 3301-51-09(I)(1).

