

Ohio Board of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology

Communicating: The Critical Component to Role Advocacy - submitted by Linda L. Wellman, Ph.D., CCC-SLP – Speech-Language Pathology Board Member

The concept of ‘speech’ services in the schools has existed for more than 100 years. In the 1950s we were known as ‘speech-teachers’ and our main role/responsibility was to work with children to ‘correct’ their mild to moderate articulation errors or fluency disorders. Though our expertise, scope of practice and title have all been expanded, there continues to be varying perceptions regarding the role of the school-based SLP including our previous role as ‘speech teachers’. Communicating our expertise/scope of practice to administrators/principals, teachers and parents is the critical component to advocate for our valuable role as a school-based speech-language pathologist.



The following are a few strategies that I have used in my various school settings over the past 29 years. You will find that some of these strategies are ongoing while other strategies are specific to times throughout the school year. I’m sure that you have used many or all of these same strategies but I hope you find something new that may help you advocate our role as a school-based speech-language pathologist.

At the beginning of the school year:

1. Talk with your principal to determine how she/he perceives your role and responsibilities as a school-based speech-language pathologist. You may assume that your principal understands your expertise and role but unless you have a direct face to face discussion, your assumptions may be false. The purpose is to evaluate how your perceptions correlate with your principal’s perceptions.
2. Send a letter home to parents introducing the school year, your scheduled days and when you are available to schedule meetings if they would like to meet with you anytime throughout the school year. Also include in your parent letter, a brief statement or two of your philosophy or thoughts regarding the important correlation between speech-language skills and academic success. Also, including an article is helpful.
3. Meet with each teacher or grade level cluster to give teachers a one-page summary of students’ IEP goals and obtain day and times for scheduling students. When I meet with teachers, I have a list of all my students, first name and last initial, so that teachers can see the number of students that I need to schedule. A subtle way to help them understand the task of scheduling students for speech-language services. During this meeting/discussion with teachers, I also discuss the service delivery model that I use and the connecting of IEP goals to the general education curriculum.
4. After you have set your schedule, send it to the teachers (with first and last initial of students). This will enable teachers to understand your schedule constraints.

Throughout the school year:

5. Email or post articles of interest so that parents and teachers can further understand your role as a school-based SLP.
6. If possible, set up a page on the school’s website and update monthly with articles of interest for parents.

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7. If it is your first year at a school, establish the procedures that you use or that is required for screenings, and referrals. When I first started, teachers would give me names of students ‘to test’ on a lunch napkin, a scrap piece of paper or just verbally give me a student’s name while passing in the hallway. If your school does not use an intervention process, this is your opportunity to incorporate that process for your speech-language referrals. **Remember, your referrals should be processed under the IDEIA guidelines. See: <http://www.ed.gov/> Know the IDEIA guidelines very well so that you are able to apply them and answer parent and teacher questions regarding eligibility and service delivery.**
8. Use students’ academic plan-book or ‘communication page’ for weekly notes home to parents and teachers. You can also email parents for updates. This will help teachers and parents to better understand your role as a valuable member of the student’s educational team. Also, you will most likely get some great input from teachers and parents. **If you send out emails to more than one parent, be sure to use the BCC line to protect confidentiality.
9. One to two weeks before parent-teacher conferences, send a hardcopy letter or email to parents and teachers regarding how you will schedule conferences. This is after you have discussed with the principal conference procedures that you will follow. If you will not be available for parent-teacher conferences, let teachers and parents know this.
10. Try to attend school staff meetings. This is a good forum to make any announcements re: what’s going on in your program, relay any interesting articles as well as demonstrating to the principal and teachers that you consider yourself an integral part of the school.

At the end of the year:

11. Send parents a closing letter with suggestions for summer activities.
12. Give your principal a summary of services including the caseload/workload calculation, other school activities in which you participated, suggestions for clustering students in classes so that you can deliver services more efficiently and possible initiatives for the following year. For more information on the caseload/workload process: <http://slpaud.ohio.gov/SBL.stm>

Have a great 2016-2017 school year!