



SAC Position Statement on the Role of Speech-Language Pathologists in Schools

Position

It is the position of Speech-Language & Audiology Canada (SAC) that speech-language pathologists (S-LPs) are essential members of educational teams supporting students of all ages with speech, language and communication challenges to achieve their academic and personal potential. Further, it is the position of SAC that all students deserve access to timely, comprehensive, evidence-based speech-language pathology services in Canadian schools.

Background

S-LPs, often supported by [communication health assistants](#), provide individualized services to students of all ages with speech, language, social communication, literacy, cognitive and swallowing impairments. They enhance academic, social, vocational and emotional outcomes by facilitating student access, participation and inclusion in the curriculum, as well as in the broader school environment (Archibald, 2017; Ebbels, McCartney, Slonims, Dockrell, & Norbury, 2018; Powell, 2018; Meaux & Norris, 2018; Walker, 2018).

The contributions of S-LPs differ from and complement the roles of other educational professionals (ASHA, 2010, 2016; Ehren, 2000; Ehren & Whitmire, 2009; Powell, 2018; Ukrainetz, 2006, 2017; Ukrainetz & Fresquez, 2003). S-LPs have distinct expertise in developing oral and written language skills, supporting successful learning and [helping students make social connections](#) in and out of the classroom. They also have specialized training in [augmentative and alternative communication](#), as well as in [feeding and swallowing](#). S-LPs are the only educational professional qualified to independently address speech sound, fluency, resonance and voice disorders.

S-LPs have a variety of roles in schools, including assessing and diagnosing speech, language, communication and swallowing disorders. As members of interprofessional teams, they also contribute to educational goal setting, planning and curriculum accessibility (Campbell, Selkirk, & Gaines, 2016; Ebbels et al., 2018; Suleman, McFarlane, Pollock, Schneider, Leroy, & Skoczylas, 2014; Walker, 2018). Interventions may take the form of individual treatment, small or large group instruction, and/or consulting and collaborating with teachers, parents and other educational support staff.

More broadly, S-LPs raise awareness about speech, language, communication and swallowing disorders and contribute to the professional development of educators.

The role of S-LPs in schools is often misunderstood by educational administrators, school staff and the general public (NLASLPA, n. d.). This arises from the wide [scope of practice](#) of S-LPs and their involvement with diverse student populations, many of whom have complex communication needs. This misunderstanding is intensified by the many ways in which S-LPs can deliver services, variation in education models and provincial/territorial funding, as well as diversity in geographical settings.

Research has shown that there are not enough S-LPs employed in Canadian schools to meet the needs of the many students who require and deserve their services (ACYI, 2005; Communication Matters, 2015; Kaegi, Svitich, Chambers, Bakker, & Schneider, 2002; NLASLPA, n. d.). This lack of resources complicates the strategic choices S-LPs must make about how to provide the best possible services and what role(s) they can have in individual schools (Archibald, 2017; Cirrin et al., 2010; Ukrainetz, 2006).

SAC advocates that [communication is a basic human right](#). Speech, language and communication skills are foundations of academic and social achievement and students of all ages need appropriate access to specialized speech-language pathology services. Canadian education systems can help students with communication challenges reach their full potential by recognizing and investing in the unique contributions of S-LPs and communication health assistants, and by improving access to comprehensive school-based speech-language pathology services.

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