



ASHA

American
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association

July 14, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair

Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
S-128, the Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and the Washington Speech-Language-Hearing Association, we write to urge you to include report language in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill to establish and fund an issue specific technical assistance (TA) center within the U.S. Department of Education to improve the ability of school-based speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and educational audiologists to meet the needs of students with communication disorders.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 223,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students. Over 2,850 ASHA members live in Washington.

Establishing a TA center focused on key issues impacting school-based SLPs and educational audiologists would provide them valuable support; thereby, helping to ensure a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with challenges that SLPs and audiologists can help address. Specifically, ASHA and WSLHA urge you to include the following report language to establish a Communications/Speech Disorders TA center within the U.S. Department of Education to support capacity building and model best practices for the assessment and treatment of communication disorders:

Communications/Speech Disorders TA Center – \$1,000,000 of the funds appropriated shall be reserved to establish a comprehensive center to support students with speech-language disorders. The center shall provide resources, guidance and best practice pertaining to the assessment and treatment to habilitate the communication disorders; identify and develop free or low-cost evidence-based tools, model programs, gather evidence-based information and/or data related to speech-language pathology clinical and professional issues including delivery models, identification and utilization of appropriate workspaces, and caseload and workload management; and provide support and guidance regarding the utilization of federal funding sources to support capacity to circumvent staffing shortages for speech-language providers within the school, community, or home setting to ensure the delivery of effective services for all children, youth and adults with disabilities and speech-language disorders within the school setting.

The House Committee on Appropriations has recognized the value of such a center by including language in its Fiscal Year 2023 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education funding bill encouraging the Department of Education to offer technical assistance to support students with speech-language disorders within school settings. Specifically, the House language notes “the importance of providing guidance and sharing best practices to ensure the delivery of effective services for all children and youth with disabilities and speech-language disorders.” ASHA and WSLHA encourage the Committee to enhance this language by requiring the Department to formally establish a TA center to furnish such assistance and provide funds for its creation and operation.

More than half of ASHA’s and WSLHA’s members work in educational settings. The services they provide help ensure that all children, particularly children with disabilities, develop effective cognitive-communication skills, acquire language bases that support reading and literacy skills, and achieve successful learning outcomes while receiving FAPE in the least restrictive environment.

Speech-language pathology services are highly utilized by students served under IDEA. According to the U.S. Department of Education’s *43rd Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA, 2021*, speech or language impairments represent the most prevalent disability category of services provided under IDEA Part B: 39.9% of children ages 3 through 5, and 16.3% of students ages 6 through 21.


According to ASHA’s 2020 Schools Survey, the top two challenges identified by school-based SLPs were excessive paperwork (81.7%) and high workload/caseload (56.5%), while educational audiologists rated those as their second (53%) and fifth most significant challenges (41.7%).

ASHA and WSLHA strongly encourage the Committee to establish and fund a Communications/Speech Disorders TA center, which would help address the needs of the significant population of students receiving speech-language services by supporting the ability of school-based SLPs, educational audiologists, educators, as well as students and their families to ensure access to FAPE and a quality education.

Thank you for considering our recommendations. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Eric Masten, ASHA’s director of federal affairs for education, at emasten@asha.org.

Sincerely,


Judy Rich, EdD, CCC-SLP, BCS-CL
2022 ASHA President


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