

Speech and Language Services

School District #83

Inter-ministerial Protocols for the Provision of Support services to Schools (2013)

- Ministerial Order 149/89 indicates "A board of a school district shall provide speech-language therapy services for students of school age who attend a school in the district and whose education is adversely affected by oral communication difficulties."

Scope of Practice - Schools

- **Speech delays and disorders** including articulation, phonology and motor speech disorders.
- **Language delays and disorders**, including expression and comprehension in oral and non-verbal contexts
- **Fluency disorders** (stuttering)
- **Voice and resonance disorders**
- **Cognitive-communicative disorders** including social communication skills, reasoning, problem solving and executive functions.
- **Pre-literacy and literacy skills** including phonological awareness, decoding, reading comprehension and writing.
- **Communication disorders related to other issues.** For example: hearing impairments, traumatic brain injury, developmental, intellectual or genetic disorders and neurological impairments.

Speech and Language Intervention

- Therapy goals are based on assessment information (standardized and non-standardized)
- Once we have set goals, we break down the learning task so that the student learns the targeted goals **sooner and faster**
- Usually we visit students once per week and we leave a program for a CEA to follow up on a daily basis (parents may also follow up)
- Speech goals include intervention for speech sound errors, error patterns, and word shapes
- Language goals may include: comprehension, grammar and sentence structure, describing and story-telling

The Speech-Language-Literacy connection

- Developmentally, oral language precedes written language
- Students with difficulties in oral language will also have delays with literacy skills
- Students with speech sound disorders are at high risk for delayed literacy acquisition
- Treating delays with oral language will help kids with literacy skills
- SLPs provide phonological (letter and sound) awareness instruction for at-risk students as part of a therapy program in addition to treating underlying speech and language disorders.

Social Communication

- Social (pragmatic) language is also within our scope of practice
- Students with autism all struggle with social communication
- Students with “high functioning” autism may show average to above average scores on a standardized language test but may still show significant functional difficulties with social skills
- Perspective taking, emotional regulation, and executive functioning are often at the core of the social communication issues
- SLPs in our district often provide “social thinking” lessons for whole classrooms
- Many students without a formal diagnosis also struggle with social thinking
- Social Stories help students to learn new social thinking concepts

Executive Functioning

- Many of our students struggle with executive functioning skills, including: planning, initiating, maintaining attention, monitoring, and self-regulation
- District SLPs have taken extensive training in this area in order to help teachers with students who are struggling
- Much of this intervention is done in the form of providing visual supports to help students understand expectations and to engage in “future thinking”

The language of math

- Math is language-based
- Children who are struggling with math often have receptive language delays. Consider the following linguistic concepts: more, less, most, least, many, few, all, none
- SLPs provide intervention in basic concept development and early math concepts

Communication and behaviour

- ABC – All Behaviour is Communication
- Many of our students present with behavioural challenges – difficulty with communication means that students use challenging behaviour to have needs met
- In addition to treating underlying issues, SLPs help school teams implement plans to improve challenging behaviour

Nonverbal students

- Some of our students are unable to speak at all. Some are “minimally verbal,” meaning that their oral language is insufficient to meet their communication needs
- SLPs provide services in the area of AAC – “Augmentative and Alternative Communication,” or helping a student communicate in alternative ways
- Solutions may be low-tech or high-tech
- In our district, nonverbal students receive service from their school SLP at the elementary level. We have a specialized position for nonverbal students in middle and high school (one day per week)

Teletherapy/Telepractice

- School District 83 SLPs are currently meeting with students using Zoom and Teams
- Telepractice is not new in our profession. Telepractice has been used for several years to service clients in remote locations
- We are meeting with students on the treatment caseload – no standardized assessments are being done at this time (although it is possible with use of a document camera)
- The challenge of teletherapy is to make activities interactive and engaging

Past caseload numbers

- We have seen a reduction in our FTE from a high of 5.8 in 1996 to our current FTE of 4.1

History of Referrals and FTE (Elementary):

- 2008/2009 – 416 Referrals – 4.2 FTE (about 100 referrals/ 1.0 FTE)
- 2012/2013- 448 Referrals – 4.0 FTE (about 112 referrals/1.0 FTE)
- 2015/2016- 507 Referrals – 4.0 FTE (about 125/1.0 FTE)
- 2019/2020 – 543 Referrals – 4.1 FTE (about 135/1.0FTE)
- Over the past 10 years our individual caseloads/workloads have increased by about 35%.

Current Caseload numbers – kindergarten to grade 5

- Priority 1/2 (severe delay in one or more areas) 200 students
- Total number of referrals – 543
- With 2954 students enrolled from K – 5 this is 19% of the population
- We currently have 4.3 FTE in our department with 0.2 allocated to nonverbal middle/high school students.
- One full time position services 50 P 1/2 students with 132 total referrals