

To: Chair, Senate Government Operations: Jeannette White

Cheryl Ewen, Legislative Committee Assistant
Senate Government Operations (afternoon)
Room 4 – [\(802\) 828- 2272](tel:(802)828-2272)
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633
cewen@leg.state.vt.us

TOPIC: Senate Bill S.217

FROM: Carol Geery, Director of Special Services, Rutland South Supervisory Union, SLP/CCC-SP

Introduction:

I am currently employed by the Rutland South Supervisory Union as the Director of Special Services. I hold a Vermont Educator license as a speech-language pathologist and as a special education director. I hold a certificate of clinical competence from the American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA). I have been in my current position for 12 years. Prior to my current position I served as a speech-language pathologist (SLP) in school districts for nearly 30 years.

National Trends: According to ASHA, 30 states either allow or require SLPs working in the schools to hold an educational SLP license.

- Their work has an influence on the education of all students.
- School Based SLPs address personal, social, academic, and vocational needs that have an impact on attainment of educational goals for all students in a school setting.
- SLP's are expected to have expertise in a variety of educational issues.

SLP Scope of Practice: Multiple Settings require unique clinical skills and expectations and a license should inform others about the professional services offered by the individual

- **Clinical Settings:** health care settings, private practice setting; universities and university clinics; individuals' homes and community residences; supported and competitive employment settings; community, state, and federal agencies and institutions; correctional institutions; and research facilities.
- **Educational settings-** public and private schools; early intervention settings, preschools, and day care centers
 - Speech-language pathologists are an essential component of The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Services from SLPs in schools are unique in that they can be delivered as either a Special Education or Related Service.
 - **Special Education Services**
 - Refers to specially designed instruction that means adapting, as appropriate, to the needs of an eligible child, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction.
 - Speaking and listening are included as essential standards of an educational program.
 - IDEA requires school districts to establish and maintain qualifications to ensure that personnel necessary to carry out special education
 - IDEA requires that special education providers are appropriately and adequately prepared and trained, as is currently determined by Vermont VSBPE
 - **Related Services**
 - Needed to assist a child to benefit from his or her special education services.
 - Examples: transportation, developmental, corrective, and other supportive services such as counseling, *Speech Therapy*, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Psychological services

School Based SLP Scope of Practice: There are unique requirements for working in an educational environment that go beyond the clinical competencies assured by ASHA's Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC/Sp). Purely clinical intervention, as occurs in other settings is rarely appropriate.

- **SLPs working in schools must possess a unique and measurable skill set.**
 - Contribute to curriculum and instruction,
 - Contribute to the literacy achievement of students with communication disorders, as well as other struggling learners.
 - Provide culturally relevant services, addressing the impact of second language acquisition or poverty on student learning and provide assistance to teachers in promoting educational growth in diverse educational environments.

- Fundamentally involved in the efforts of schools to prevent academic failure
- Accountable for student performance outcomes by supporting data-based decision making related to individual student performance as well as overall program success.
- Implement service delivery models are typically more diverse in the school setting than in clinical settings.

School Based SLP Responsibilities: SLPs make special contributions to curriculum and instruction, based on their focused expertise in language for students with disabilities, as well as other learners who are at risk for school failure or struggle in school settings

- Responsible for meeting federal and state mandates and adhering to local policies as well.
- Responsible for Special Education Case Management, Evaluation, IEP development, Medicaid billing, report writing, classroom interventions, supervision of Para educators and treatment plan development.
- Provide services to support the implementation of instructional programs.
- Work closely with classroom teachers, reading specialists, literacy coaches, special education teachers, occupational therapists, physical therapists, school psychologists, audiologists, guidance counselors, social workers.
- Coordinate educational programs with other agencies involved in teaching or providing services to children and youth, including, for example, physicians, private therapy practitioners, mental health and social service agencies, private schools, and vocational rehabilitation staff is required.
- Contribute to designing and conducting professional development and working with school and district administrators in designing and implementing general education and special education programs.

Recruitment and Retention: Limited graduate programs results in a limited pool of applicants results in difficulty with recruitment and retention of speech language pathologists in our schools. Removing the ability of SLPs to hold a teaching license will result in difficulty of Vermont schools to hire and retain SLPs as members of their staff to meet the requirements of state and federal laws. There will be a need to rely on contracted services which is less effective than having an SLP on staff.

- The ability to offer applicants competitive salaries, with master agreements, access to teacher retirement and other teacher benefits helps with attracting viable candidates.
- Difficulty with recruiting staff (ie: Occupational Therapists) due to a lack of a teacher license.
 - Not part of a teacher’s master agreement
 - Unable to access the Teacher Retirement Program.
 - Support staff agreements are often not comparable to teacher benefits.

In summary, S.217 would not serve the public good. The school based SLP's contribution to the educational setting extends beyond clinical skills and requires additional specialized competencies. The consequence of these bills would result in a detrimental effect on the delivery of special education services and the recruitment and retention of qualified SLPs. This will have a harmful effect on the public, primarily students with disabilities and their families.

As the current OPR license does not address the specialized competencies necessary for school SLP's, the VSBPE should continue to be allowed to offer a license for educational speech-language pathologists. This will address the quality of special education personnel as required by IDEA, allow appropriate compensation, retention and career paths for school SLPs and result in better outcomes for students with disabilities and their families. Removing SLPs from the larger educational community and separating them from other educational professionals would be counterproductive. The VSBPE offers the most appropriate licensing option for integrating educational SLP services within with the priorities of the education system as a whole.