

VCSEA Testimony to House Education Committee concerning S. 130 - regarding Speech Language Pathologists serving in Vermont public schools or an independent school approved for special education purposes

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VCSEA supports that the role of Educational Speech Language Pathologist be subject to the licensing and professional standards provisions of 16 V.S.A chapter 51 and receive a license and endorsement from the Agency of Education for the following reasons:

- SLPs serve as educators in the schools and removing them from an educational endorsement process within AOE must be carefully considered. The role of the SLP is central to the educational pursuits of language acquisition, communication and literacy. Language acquisition is key to academic skill development and access to the curriculum. SLP services are often at the heart of the educational program for students who struggle with language and literacy.
- Educational endorsement of SLPs in a manner similar to other teacher colleagues is central to supporting a consistent educational culture, climate and experience. The performance skills and knowledge identified in the current Educational Speech Language Endorsement within the AOE (5440-84) are vital to the role of the SLP in schools. Included are case management, assessment, collaborative work with teachers and designing and implementing educational plans “including directly teaching, or supervising the teaching of the communication skills essential to literacy development.” The skill set needed within school settings is different from practice within clinical settings. Maintaining the endorsement of educational SLPs within the Vermont AOE is appropriate to assure for the knowledge and skills identified in the endorsement within our schools. The education of our children is the primary function of the AOE.
- Vermont Special Education Regulation Rules (2360.2.12 (b)(1)(iii)) specify that speech language pathology services “...may be special education, if provided as specially designed instruction; or related services, if required to assist a student with a disability to benefit from special education.” Both educator and related services provider roles are important to SLP practice in schools.
- VCSEA supports the role of the overall system of educator licensing as established within the AOE. The interconnectedness of educator quality and licensing within AOE in conjunction with the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators and the Local Standards Boards throughout the state assures for a critical feedback loop for educator quality, updating educator endorsements, and communication with the institutions of higher education in updating professional coursework that leads to recommendations for licensure. Removal of the educational SLPs from this system does not appear to serve the interests of an integrated educational system for our children.
- VCSEA sought input from a limited number of SLPs serving within the public education system. The message was clear from those we spoke with that they viewed themselves as educators and wanted to be considered an integral part of the education system. VCSEA was concerned about removing one educational license area from the overall educational system.
- VCSEA is also concerned about an accessible and streamlined licensing process within AOE. AOE capacity is, we believe, a significant factor in the difficulties applicants for licenses and renewal experience.

It is critical that all implications, beyond convenience, of moving an educator licensing function away from the current AOE educator endorsement structure and process be considered. Positive educational outcomes for our children demands such care.