

SCOPE OF WORK

Project Abstract

The purpose of the Working with the Experts (WWE) project is to increase the State's capacity to prepare and retain highly qualified personnel to provide instructional and related services to students with disabilities. The initiatives for this project include the coordination of professional development (PD) activities for related service personnel (speech language pathologists), delivery and statewide leadership support for PD, and communication with faculty preparing teachers to support students with disabilities in the educational setting. To assist in supporting improved student outcomes, the project will coordinate six regional WWE activities for speech language pathologists (SLPs) and will provide access to online PD courses that offer American Speech Language Hearing Association (ASHA) continuing education units (CEUs) to SLPs. In addition, this project will provide support for and facilitate the WWE event for Leaders and WWE for SLPs Advisory Committee meetings. ASHA CEUs will be provided for SLP PD activities coordinated by WWE, other discretionary projects and organizations, and school districts. The project will also expand the content of speech language resources located on the WWE website. Additionally, the project will provide PD activities for faculty supporting the preparation of teachers working with students with disabilities by coordinating the 2022 Florida Institute for Teacher Educators (FLITE), developing and disseminating the Plugging In newsletter, and facilitating the delivery of webinars or professional learning communities. Provision of PD for both SLPs and teacher preparation program faculty will be driven by the results of needs assessments and advisory council suggestions.

Established Need

According to the 42nd Annual Report to Congress (2020), 71,751 full-time equivalent (FTE) SLPs were employed to provide related services for children and students ages 3 through 21 served under IDEA, Part B, in Fall 2017. Of these, 70,096 were fully certified. The U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) found that employment of speech language pathologists is projected to grow 27 percent from 2018 to 2028, much faster than the average for all occupations. An additional 41,900 SLPs will be needed nationwide to fill the demand between 2018 and 2028.

Schools nationwide are facing a severe shortage of SLPs. In 2018, overall, about half (54%) of SLPs reported that job openings for clinicians exceeded job seekers in their type of school and geographic area the same or about the same as in 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016 (ASHA Schools Survey Report, 2018). According to ASHA'S 2018 Schools Survey, the resulting scarcity of SLPs is a nationwide concern because most SLPs are employed in school settings. Interestingly, the percentage of SLPs employed in schools versus other settings has declined each year from 55.4% in 2007 to 51% in 2020 (ASHA Supply and Demand Resource List, 2021).

Florida Education Certification Statistics for July 6, 2014, revealed there were 883 individuals certified in Speech Correction, (grades K-12) and 1730 individuals who held certificates in Speech Language Impaired (grades K-12). On May 10, 2015, the number of individuals certified in Speech Correction (grades K-12) was 886 and the number of individuals certified in Speech Language Impaired (grades K-12) was 1960. The number of certified individuals increased in 2015 for the first time in several years, however, statistics over the past several years show a decrease once again. In 2016, the number of individuals certified in Speech Correction (grades K-12) was 813, and the number of individuals certified in Speech Language Impaired (grades K-12) was 1918. In 2019, the number of individuals certified in Speech Correction (grades K-12) was 639, and the number of individuals certified in Speech Language Impaired (grades K-12) was 1909. In 2021 the number of individuals certified in Speech Correction (grades K-12) was 529, and the number of individuals certified in Speech Language Impaired (grades K-12) was 1707. The demand for therapists by Florida schools is greater than the availability of professionals. In fact, according to FDOE in 2019-2020 Florida schools employed or contracted with 3506 SLPs, 71 of these not fully certified.

According to the 2020-2021 Survey 2 Florida Exceptional Student Data, 46,131 students were classified as speech impaired while 40,998 were classified as language impaired for a total of 87,129 students. These students, in addition to students in other disability categories, receive services from SLPs. Other categories include Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (47,667 students) Developmental Delay (DD) (22,593 students), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) (438 students), and Deaf/Hearing Impaired (4181 students). (FDOE/Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services [BESE] Student Membership in Programs for Exceptional Students, 2010-21). As the numbers of students in many of the areas continues to increase, Exceptional Student Education which includes SLP positions continues to be identified as a Critical Teacher Shortage Area by the FDOE Division of Accountability, Research and Measurement. The current number of SLP vacancies in Florida schools is 220 for 2020-21. This is an increase from 202 for 2019-20. These are among the highest projected vacancies and highest number of current vacancies and have increased with each year.

The shortage of SLPs is (and has been) a persistent problem and a top concern for all special education leaders, and the shortage of qualified SLPs is growing (ASHA, 2012). In an effort to retain SLPs in the public schools, six regional WWE events for SLPs, online PD opportunities, and a WWE leaders/coordinators event have been proposed for the 2021-2022 funding cycle. Current research supports the interrelationships across the language processes of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension (Elleseff, 2020). SLPs contribute significantly to the literacy achievement of students with communication disorders, as well as other learners who are at risk for school failure or those who struggle in school settings. With the ever-increasing diversity in the schools, SLPs make important contributions to ensure that all students receive quality, culturally competent services. This expertise leads to more accurate and appropriate identification of student needs. SLPs also address the impact of language differences and second language acquisition on student learning and provide assistance to teachers in promoting educational growth. SLPs provide a distinct set of skills based on their focused expertise in language. They offer assistance in addressing the linguistic and metalinguistic foundations of curriculum learning for students with disabilities, as well as other learners who are at risk for school failure or those who struggle in school settings.

Through the WWE-SLP 2021 Needs Assessment specific topics were identified for PD and the continued need for WWE-SLP was confirmed. The 2018-19 Discretionary Project Survey results indicate that 94% of districts strongly agree or agree that WWE-SLP is responsive to their needs and 94% strongly agree or agree that district staff perceive the work of the WWE-SLP to be high quality and assist them in meeting identified needs. The WWE-SLP project will continue to make a concerted effort to identify and meet district needs through collaboration with Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Directors and/or their appointed SLP Coordinators.

Sustaining and implementing the numerous initiatives in the state of Florida to increase student success and improve schools will require the preparation of personnel who demonstrate the critical skills needed to implement effective instructional practices and who possess a strong knowledge base of the Florida's Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (B.E.S.T.) Standards. When combined with the ongoing critical shortages of highly effective teachers to serve students with disabilities, the need for continued collaboration with IHE faculty and programs is paramount. This collaboration is facilitated through WWE-SLP activities such as the Florida Institute for Teacher Educators (FLITE), the Plugging In Newsletter, webinars, and the Winter IHE Teacher Educator meeting typically held at the Administrators Management Meeting (AMM).

Support of the BESE Strategic Plan/State Performance Plan (SPP)

The State Performance Plan (SPP) outlines improvement activities and identifies resources for each of the indicators in the plan. The WWE project supports the targeted outcomes of the BESE Strategic Plan indicators below:

Indicator #1 Percent of youth with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) graduating from high school with a regular diploma

Target for 202-2022: The percent of youth with IEPs graduating from high school with a standard diploma will increase to 100% by 2024 (The actual rate for 2018-19 was 86.9% and for 2019-20 was 90.0%)

Indicator #3 Participation and performance of children with IEPs on Statewide assessments: 3C.
Proficiency rate for children with IEPs against grade level modified and alternate academic achievement standards

Targets for 2021-2022

Indicator 3C.1 67.5% of students with IEPs will demonstrate proficiency in reading

Indicator 3C.2 67.5% of students with IEP demonstrate proficiency in math (The target for 2021-22 is 67.5% or greater than or equal to 2% growth.)

The WWE project supports the outcomes of the BESE Strategic Plan by targeting the graduation rates of students with disabilities with regular diplomas and by targeting increased proficiency of students with disabilities in reading and math as demonstrated by improved performance on statewide assessments. The WWE activities address these indicators by providing PD activities, technical assistance, resources, and support for SLPs aligned with the Florida's Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (B.E.S.T.) Standards and evidence-based practices. Through the provision of WWE-SLP and WWE-SLP Leaders PD opportunities, the effectiveness of related service personnel will be increased. PD opportunities will include content related to literacy, language development, assistive technology, writing, instructional strategies, English language learners, and other areas that will positively impact outcomes for students with disabilities.

In addition, the project will collaborate with other discretionary projects such as FDLRS, Access Project, and the Technical Assistance and Training System (TATS) to provide ASHA CEUs for training activities. Collaboration also takes place with regard to program issues, event locations, and PD topics within the WWE-SLP Advisory Committee which includes members from each of the state SLP consortiums as well as the state WWE-SLP director and the BESE Speech Language Program Specialist. WWE-SLP and WWE for occupational therapists (OTs) and physical therapists (PTs) (WWE-OT/PT) also collaborate when possible in the offering of WWE face-to-face events and leaders events that are of interest to SLPs, OTs, PTs and district leaders. At a national level, collaboration exists with the ASHA for the provision of CEUs. Collaboration with IHEs and among IHE faculty takes place through the provision of the Florida Institute for Teacher Educators, meeting at the AMM, IHE webinars/professional learning communities, and IHE newsletter. Finally, through the Teachers and Leaders work group of the BESE Strategic Plan, increased collaboration with various FDOE bureaus, discretionary projects, and IHE representatives has led to expansion of resource sharing and a focus on clarity at all levels of the personnel preparation systems to address the needs of students with disabilities.

Evaluation Plan

For WWE SLP and SLP Leaders' activities as well as the Florida Institute for Teacher Educators participant evaluations will be conducted following each activity using a 6-point Likert scale to collect responses to questions regarding the extent to which the training increased participant knowledge; the extent to which the training met its intended objectives; the extent to which participants felt they would use what they learned from the training; and the extent to which participants would recommend the training to others. These questions will also be asked of participants in the online courses provided through the BESE Portal to PDA.

The project will work to increase the number of personnel and districts receiving PD through WWE program as demonstrated by the Discretionary Project Survey. The project will also work to increase the number of districts who strongly agree that WWE-SLP is responsive to district needs and provides high quality assistance to meet district needs as indicated on the Discretionary Project Survey.

Support for Strategic Plan

The WWE Project activities will address the Florida State Board of Education Strategic Plan 2020-2025 including the identification of targeted State Performance Plan Indicators. The Strategic Plan was developed with four overarching goals in mind. The WWE project activities support Goal 1: Highest Student Achievement which includes performance and growth, closing the gap, and high school completion.

WWE addresses the Goal 1 measures below:

Measure 5 Continued Achievement Growth on Florida Assessments Percent of students making learning gains in: English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics

Measure 6 Closing the Achievement Gap - Percent of students achieving grade-level or above performance in the four core subject areas by subgroup

Measure 7 High School Graduation Rate Percent of students graduating with a standard diploma in 4 years

Measure 9 (K-12) - Successful Transition of English Language Learners Percent of English Language Learners achieving grade-level and above performance and making learning gains on state assessments by ELL service level and years in ESOL program

The WWE Project provides high quality PD to SLPs through presentations conducted by national experts and online courses developed by leaders in the field. Topics focus on evidence-based practices to improve student outcomes and techniques and strategies that will promote meaningful participation of SLPs on the problem-solving teams. SLPs play an integral role in closing the gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities, between students who are non-English Language Learners and English Language Learners, and students who are disadvantaged due to having reading and language difficulties.

Research supports the interrelationships across the language processes of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. SLPs are uniquely able to contribute significantly to the literacy achievement of students with communication disorders, as well as other struggling learners. In addition, with the ever-increasing diversity in school populations. SLPs make important contributions to ensure that all students receive quality, culturally competent services. SLPs have the expertise to distinguish a language disorder from language differences related to cultural and linguistic diversity, socioeconomic factors, lack of adequate prior instruction, and/or the challenges of acquiring the Standard American English dialect used in the schools. This expertise leads to more accurate and appropriate identification of student needs. SLPs can also address the impact of language differences and second language acquisition on student learning and provide assistance to teachers in promoting educational growth.

Additionally, SLPs provide services to support instructional programs at schools. SLPs unique contributions complement and augment those made by other professionals who also have unique perspectives and skills. SLPs work with general education teachers who have the primary responsibility for curriculum and instruction. SLPs also work closely with reading specialists, literacy coaches, special education teachers, occupational therapists, physical therapists, school psychologists, audiologists, guidance counselors, and social workers. SLPs are an integral part of the team and assist teachers to ensure the academic and/or educational success of students (Hudson, Mount, & Richard, 2019).

In addition, to providing PD to SLPs, the WWE project also provides PD resources to faculty in education programs for related service personnel and teacher preparation programs. The Florida Institute for Teacher Educators, webinars, meetings, and newsletter provide faculty opportunities to receive updates on initiatives from the Florida Department of Education (FDOE), receive training related to evidence-based research, and network and collaborate to improve teacher preparation leading to highly effective teacher.