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Position Statement

Missed Sessions in Missouri Public Schools

About this Document

This position statement was drafted by the Executive Board of the Missouri Speech-Language-Hearing Association. A letter of guidance and clarification by The United States Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, dated March 8, 2007, on the subject of hiring substitutes and making up missed therapy sessions was referenced and is quoted in this Statement.

Position Statement

It is the position of the Missouri Speech-Language-Hearing Association (MSHA) that speech-language pathologists (SLPs) play a critical and direct role in the development of academic skills for children and adolescents with communication impairments. Current research supports the finding that children with communication impairments are at high risk for difficulty acquiring literacy skills commensurate with typically developing students. Because of their unique expertise, SLPs also contribute to the social and functional development of the students they serve.

It is the position of MSHA that it is the responsibility of each school district to provide high quality, appropriate therapy for students diagnosed with communication impairments in order to facilitate adequate progress toward Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals. Each district has the responsibility to assure these students are served by the most qualified providers and that therapy is goal-oriented and effective and evidence-based from current literature and research. SLPs receive unique training in all aspects of communication including facilitation of skills directly related to literacy.

When students are served by providers who are less than qualified, adequate progress cannot be assured.

The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) issued an opinion on March 8, 2007 regarding missed therapy sessions. The letter containing this opinion stated, "...written guidance on the need to use substitutes and to schedule make-up sessions when speech-language pathology sessions are missed due to a child's absence from school, cancellation for a class or school activity, or absence of the speech-language pathologist. IDEA and the regulations do not address these issues. State and local educational agencies are required to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them FAPE, consistent with the child's individualized education program (IEP). We encourage public agencies to consider the impact of a provider's absence or a child's absence on the child's progress and performance and determine how to ensure the continued provision of FAPE in order for the child to continue to progress and meet the annual goals in his or her IEP. Whether an interruption in services constitutes a denial of FAPE is an individual determination that must be made on a case-by-case basis."

In consideration of the OSERS statement, it is MSHA's position that school districts should not establish a general policy for making up missed speech-language therapy sessions. Each child's IEP team should consider the impact of the missed sessions on the child's progress and determine whether interruption of services constitutes a denial of FAPE.

In a situation, such as long term or multiple absences, where it is determined that missed sessions result in a denial of FAPE, the school district should be responsible for obtaining qualified professionals to provide the make-up sessions for these students. These services may be offered to the parents of the child before or after school or during summer break or other school vacations. The contracted SLP may be considered as the "substitute" provider if it is in his or her contract or other arrangements may be made for compensation.

If for any reason a substitute professional is considered to provide services in the place of the contracted SLP, it is MSHA's position that every effort should be made by the district to locate a provider who has as a minimum one of the three following qualifications:

- 1) DESE certification for licensure as a Speech-Language Pathologist,

- 2) Licensure through the Missouri State Board of Healing Arts, or
- 3) The Certificate of Clinical Competence from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.

The district may contract with another public or private agency using whatever sources of support are available, but the services must be at no cost to the parent.