

OSLHA Advocacy Alert: Caseload Crisis in Ohio's Schools

- ❖ **Ohio's school-based SLP caseload ratio is the one of the highest in the country at 80:1**
- ❖ Ohio's caseload rule (Ohio Administrative Code Section 3301-51-09 (I)(3)(f)) was originally adopted in July 1982 and has not been substantively updated in 28 years.
- ❖ Research has shown that lowered caseloads result in significant increases in student classroom performance. Lower caseloads would mean greater progress towards educational goals, higher graduation rates, less time in treatment, and reduced cost to school districts and the State of Ohio.
- ❖ School districts must be in compliance with state and federal laws such as The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind). Pursuant to these statutory mandates, students with disabilities must be given the resources and support services so they can achieve success. Lower caseloads will ensure that the students receive this required support.
- ❖ In order to attract and retain quality speech-language pathologists in the school setting, caseloads must be reduced. Large caseloads and expanded responsibilities are factors contributing toward high rates of attrition in the schools. Research has consistently shown that caseload size was predictive of job satisfaction for speech-language pathologists working in the schools.
- ❖ The roles of the school-based SLP have changed immensely over the past twenty years. There has been a steady increase in the severity and complexity of students seen for service. In addition to students with learning and communication disorders, the SLP plays a significant role in the management of students with swallowing and feeding problems in school settings. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) and IDEA mandate services for health-related disorders that affect the ability of the student to access educational programs and participate fully. All of this has required SLPs to spend more time in developing supports for students as well as more meetings, paperwork and consultation with other professionals in order to meet these students' needs.
- ❖ In early 2008, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), Office of Exceptional Children, convened a Caseload/Ratios Steering Committee to gather and analyze information about service provider ratios and recommend rule changes. The Committee included: educators, parents, special education and related services providers, children's advocates, staff representing state agencies, members of regulatory boards and leaders of organizations. In March of 2010, the Committee presented its findings to the State Board of Education, which then authorized a funded study of service provider ratios. The study will address how to set ratios and will recommend a formula or formulas for the calculation of SLP ratios that incorporates a workload approach. The request for proposals for school districts to participate in the study was released in early September 2010.
- ❖ It is the position of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) "that the total workload activities required and performed by school-based SLPs must be taken into account to set caseload standards." Workload refers to all activities required and performed by school-based SLPs. Workload includes direct services to students as well as other activities necessary to support student education programs, implement best practices, and ensure compliance with IDEA and other mandates. "For SLPs to be productive in the many roles and responsibilities for which their expertise prepares them, they must have reasonable workloads." *Roles and Responsibilities of Speech-Language Pathologists in Schools*, ASHA, 2010.