

Personnel Shortages & MOESC's Notes

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Mid-Ohio Educational Service Center

September 29, 2023

The Ohio Association of Pupil Service Administrators Executive Director requested that Mid-Ohio submit a proposal to The National Coalition on Personnel Shortages in Special Education and Related Services (NCPSSERS).

I attended the Coalition's 2023 Event Planning Meeting and highlighted the efforts of Mid-Ohio ESC to **attract**, **recruit**, and **retain** related services personnel. My presentation was not selected for the event on October 11th; however, I was asked to attend and openly share our efforts. An overview of the original presentation outline is included below.

1. Mid-Ohio Educational Service Center Historical Staffing Trends

- a. Discipline Shortages
 - i. Psychologists, approximately three/year
 - ii. Speech Language Therapists, approximately three/year
- b. Recruitment efforts have increasingly become complicated each year, specifically within the last 5 to 7 years in our region.
- c. ***This 2023 hiring season, MOESC needed to fill for 13 SLP placements.***

2. Mid-Ohio Educational Service Center's Response to Shortages

- a. In 2020, Mid-Ohio ESC established the School Psychology Development Program followed by the Speech Language Development Program one year later (a.k.a. **Grow Your Own Development Program**).
 - i. Our School Psychology and Speech Language Therapy Development Programs seek to identify, recruit, and retain qualified candidates in the community for school psychology and speech language therapy certification for a work commitment following licensure.
 - ii. The Mid-Ohio ESC Governing Board shall reimburse the cost of tuition for the Participant, up to the total requisite number of hours to complete the program.
 - iii. Eligibility
 1. Accepted in an accredited Graduate Program Requirements
 2. Upon Employment
 - a. Full-Time Graduate School Coursework
 - b. Full-Time Internship
 - c. Ohio Department of Education Licensure Commitment
 - d. Employment through Mid-Ohio Educational Service Center for five years
 - iv. Program Benefits
 1. Graduate Tuition Reimbursement
 2. Engagement with School Psychology and Speech Language Professionals
 3. Ongoing Professional Development
 4. Regular Networking Opportunities
 - v. Our current "depth chart" for Psychologists includes 8 candidates out to the year 2029, 5 SLP candidates out to the year 2028.
 - vi. Based on our current trend data, Mid-Ohio ESC still has room to bring in more candidates and goals to continuously improve our programming.
- b. **Retention Efforts:** Mid-Ohio ESC has looked closely at our retention efforts and developed a strategic plan with our related services personnel representatives to analyze and consistently improve the climate and culture of our department. The focus is on frequent and consistent communication, recognition, and continuous professional learning and mentorship. We continue to provide opportunities to build relationships to increase loyalty and trust through a variety of social activities.

3. Next Steps:

- a. Mid-Ohio ESC's primary goal is to recruit potential candidates from our region to train and return our candidates back to the ESC's regional footprint. Our current program has been focused on the graduate level for recruitment. A new focus is to strategize and extend our pipeline to begin at the high school level with creating a mentorship program for students to investigate and shadow exceptional providers in the fields of psychology, speech and language therapy, and other high need service areas.

- b. In addition, I will continue to advocate that the State of Ohio consider Speech Language Assistant Programs and Licenses to support the shortage and workload of our current Speech Language Therapists.

Below is an email from Gregg Thornton, the Executive Director of the Speech and Hearing Professionals Board, in response to sharing Mid-Ohio ESCs efforts and continued struggle to hire Speech Language Therapists in our region.

From: gregg.thornton@shp.ohio.gov <gregg.thornton@shp.ohio.gov>
Sent: Thursday, September 21, 2023 1:43 PM
To: bernadette.laughlin@education.ohio.gov; Jennifer L. Crum <crum.jennifer@moesc.net>; Donna Stelzer <oapsa.donnastelzer@gmail.com>
Cc: Kevin Kimmel <kimmel.kevin@moesc.net>
Subject: RE: NCPSSERS 2023 Meeting Follow-Up

Hello Jennifer,

I was copied on this e-mail and wanted to add my perspective regarding your inquiry about speech assistants in Ohio. From the licensure board's perspective, we are not seeing a critical shortage of speech-language pathologists in Ohio. Attached, please find a licensure summary showing our licensing trends for the past 13 years, along with our licensure totals as of September 14, 2023. As you will see, Ohio has seen incredible increases in SLP and Conditional SLP licensure throughout this time period. We have consistently seen double-digit percentage increases for those two license types, and well exceeding five percent overall for all license types. We expect this trend to continue well beyond this decade. This is due, in large part, from the 12 graduate level SLP programs we have in Ohio, which are Bowling Green State University, University of Toledo, Cleveland State University, Baldwin Wallace University, Case Western Reserve University, University of Akron, Kent State University, Ohio State University, Miami University, Ohio University, University of Cincinnati, and in 2024, Mount Saint Joseph University.

According to our licensure data which was tabulated at the end of the last renewal cycle in January 2023, nearly half of all licensed SLPs and conditional SLPs work in the school setting. This represents our largest work setting. More SLPs work in the schools than our other work settings, such as hospitals or skilled nursing facilities. ***JC* Note that Morrow County Hospital requested to collaborate with MOESC to share SLP providers to work PRN work outside of their educational position because their SLP resources were limited.*** Nearly half of the conditional SLPs we license each year go into the schools. Earlier this year, we also surveyed the 11 universities with active graduate programs regarding their enrollment and graduation trends. All projected they intended to maintain or increase their enrollment, and all had graduation rates close to 100%. Based on all the data, we expect to see continued growth in our SLP and Conditional SLP licensure that will meet or exceed the Bureau of Labor and Statistics projection that nationally, the employment for speech-language pathologists will grow 19% between 2022 and 2032. JC ****We have contracted with state and national third-provider companies who also share that SLP providers are hard to find.***

The licensure board has long maintained a position that students must receive the highest quality in skilled care from licensed SLPs to maximize their academic progress in the schools. Our licensure is a member of the National Council of State Boards of Examiners for Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology (NCSB), which comprise SLP/AUD licensure boards across the U.S. Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia are members of NCSB and license speech assistants. I have spoken with our counterparts in these states, as well as in Texas and others that license speech assistants. The information I continue to receive from other states that license and regulate speech assistants is that speech assistants do not provide the same level of skill and experience that a master's level SLP provides, and boards receive complaints about SLP-As being over utilized. In addition, I also hear that SLP-As did not reduce the workload of SLPs as expected because the SLP is still responsible for supervising and overseeing the SLP-As caseload.

We do not believe the licensing of speech assistants in Ohio is a good solution to ensure the needs of students and consumers are being met. The last critical shortage of school SLPs that Ohio experienced was in 2007-2008. Ohio had an opportunity to bring in speech assistants back then to address this critical shortage; however, through a broad and multi-faceted collaboration of groups and organizations, which included the Ohio Department of Education, several state universities, the licensure board, and state associations, the OMNIE program was created to address the shortage. Under the OMNIE program, the Student Permit was created, which the licensure board issued to graduate students who completed their 1st year of school. Under the Student Permit, a graduate student starting their 2nd year was placed with a school district. In exchange for tuition

reimbursement, sign-on bonus, and other incentives, the graduate student made a 3-year commitment to stay on with the school district after their graduation. The program was a huge success and quickly modeled by other states to address their critical SLP shortage. It completely resolved the critical shortage Ohio had at that time, which was mainly brought on by retirements due to changes in the STRS. At that time, many SLPs decided to retire early before the STRS changes took effect.

The licensure board still has the student permit in its laws and rules. The only thing needed would be one of the state universities to coordinate and oversee the student's placement. And financial incentives would also be needed, such as tuition reimbursement and/or a sign-on bonus to incentivize a 2nd year graduate student to work and stay-on with the school district after their graduation.

Another option would be for school districts to contact the 12 graduate programs directly and participate in their respective job fairs. When I speak at various universities each year to the graduate students about the application and licensure requirements, many of them are still looking for jobs, and many indicate they are interested in working in the school setting. Speaking antidotally, I don't believe many school district HR administrators who are trying to fill SLP positions even know that we have 12 graduate programs in Ohio and that they can contact them about attending university job fair so the graduate students know there is a position open.

Ohio does have support personnel, such as speech-language pathology aides and audiology aides. However, speech-Language pathology aides are not the same as speech assistants, but they can provide support with record keeping and they're also permitted to perform speech and hearing screenings subject to a pass/fail determination. ***JC*I am unaware of a license that supports this in Ohio.***

If you have any questions or would like to discuss further, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Gregg