Practice Guidelines for Supervisors of Speech-Language Pathology Assistants

History of speech-language pathology assistants (SLPA) in Colorado

Who are they?

Speech Language Pathology Assistants (SLPAs) are individuals who enhance and extend the services of Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) in the school setting. They provide intervention services to students who have Speech Language Impairments following the plans of their SLP supervisor along with other responsibilities listed below. SLPAs were introduced in Colorado in 1997. The Colorado SLPA Consortia along with the Colorado Department of Education determined that the minimum entry level for employment as a SLPA is a bachelor degree. Other states have programs and licensing for SLPAs with Associate Degrees, but Colorado does not.

What Colorado law establishes the employability of the SLPA?

The Colorado Educator Licensing Act of 1991 established the authorization of Speech-Language Pathology Assistants to work in schools under the supervision of certified speech-language pathologists. The law was amended with HB 10-1034 in 2010 to include statutory requirements that individuals must meet to be Authorized by the Colorado Department of Education as a School Speech-Language Pathology Assistant (SLPA). Individuals who have bachelor's degrees other than Speech Language Hearing Sciences can, with additional coursework, qualify for the SLPA Authorization.

How are they trained and what credentials do they need to work in the Colorado public schools?

For the Colorado Department of Education SLPA Authorization, an SLPA must have a bachelor's degree in Speech Language Hearing Sciences (or equivalent). They also must complete an SLPA Course including a field experience from one of the Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) in Colorado. The approved SLPA programs are at the Metropolitan State University of Denver, University of Colorado - Boulder, and the University of Northern Colorado. The SLPA course is offered either online or in a hybrid model (online and in person classes) and the field experience is completed in the public schools as part of and during the course.

SLPAs have been hired in other settings, but their training focuses on working in the school setting with students birth to 21 years of age.

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What is the process for obtaining the SLPA credentials?
An SLPA needs a CDE SLPA Authorization (not a license). The CDE SLPA Authorization application can be found on the CDE licensing website at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprof/auth.htm. The SLPA CDE Authorization may be renewed every 5 years with 50 hours of CDE approved continuing education. The application to renew an SLPA CDE Authorization is also found online.

What scope of work is appropriate for an SLPA?

The role of the SLPA is to extend the services of a certified and licensed SLP. The SLPA performs tasks as *prescribed, directed, and supervised* by the SLP. In Colorado, the Consortium to Train SLPAs (2000-2013) adopted the roles and responsibilities of SLPAs from two documents. *Background Information and Criteria for the Registration of SLPAs*, published by the Council of Academic Accreditation (October, 2001) and the *Guidelines for the Training, Use, and Supervision of Speech-Language Pathology Assistants (2004)* resulted in a list of activities that the SLPA may engage in and activities that are not appropriate for an SLPA.

*What **may** an SLPA do in public schools?*
The SLPA may conduct the following tasks under the supervision of a speech-language pathologist:
- Follow documented intervention plans or protocols developed by the supervising SLP
- Document student performance (e.g., tally data for the SLP to use; prepare progress charts and records) and report this information to the SLP
- Assist the SLP with speech-language and hearing screenings (without interpretation)
- Assist the SLP during assessment of students
- Assist with informal documentation
- Assist with clerical duties and departmental operations, such as preparing materials and scheduling activities Perform checks and maintenance of equipment
- Support the SLP in research projects, in-service training, and public relations programs
- Collect data for quality monitoring and improvement
- Exhibit compliance with regulations, reimbursement requirements, and SLPA job responsibilities

*What is **outside the SLPA scope** of responsibilities?*
- Perform standardized or non-standardized diagnostic tests, formal or informal evaluations, or interpret test results
- Screen, test or diagnose students for feeding/swallowing disorders
- Use checklists or tabulate results for feeding or swallowing evaluations or demonstrate swallowing strategies or precautions to students, family or staff

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- Participate in parent conferences, case conferences, staffings, or interdisciplinary team meetings without the SLP present
- Provide counseling for students, parents or families
- Write, develop or modify a student's individualized educational plan (IEP)
- Write, develop or modify a student's SLP intervention plan
- Sign any formal documents
- Select or dismiss students for/from services
- Disclose clinical or confidential information orally or in writing to anyone other than the SLP
- Make referral for additional evaluations or intervention services
- Counsel or consult with the student, family or others regarding the student's status or services
- Represent himself/herself as a speech-language pathologist

What does it mean for the SLPA to support and extend the work of the SLP?

The SLP and SLPA should work as a team in the public school setting. This is accomplished through consistent dialogue, clear delineation of roles and responsibilities, timely and effective supervision of the SLPA by the SLP, periodic review of benefits and challenges, and collaborative problem-solving activities. A survey conducted in 2012, as part of a continuing education activity for SLPs sponsored by the Colorado Department of Education and a subsequent focus group, identified how SLPAs support and extend the work of SLPs. Many of the ideas address better student outcomes and more efficient use of time.

- Quality therapy for more intense periods resulting in quicker dismissal rates for students
- Increased growth/progress on student goals
- More intervention opportunities for students
- More intervention opportunities for students in RtI
- More consistent services
- Increased ability to serve students in rural areas
- Additional time/sessions with students (e.g., twice rather than once per week)
- Flexibility for incorporating service delivery models
- Another set of eyes for student support
- Engagement in prevention activities
- Increased practice for students with articulation and language goals
- SLPs can reach more students
- Opportunities for smaller groups and 1:1
- Increased therapy sessions as SLPAs cover the caseload during staffings, diagnostic activities, and other duties
- Increased opportunities for SLPs to consult and collaborate with colleagues as SLPAs cover the caseload

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Supervision of the SLPA

Who supervises and what is the supervision recommendation for an SLPA?
SLPs and school administrators must have a clear understanding of the supervision recommendations of SLPAs. They are support personnel who by the nature and extent of their education cannot function independently.

Who is responsible for evaluating the SLPA?
Each district would determine the personnel to evaluate the SLPA in relationship to job performance; however, "a certified speech-language pathologist (SLP)" is the only appropriate professional to supervise the educational practices of the SLPA (1 CCR 301-37, 2260.5-R-4.11(1)). No other professional may serve as the SLPA supervisor. It is recommended that the evaluator collaborate with the supervising SLP for the performance review.

How much supervision is recommended?
Training as an SLPA requires a bachelor's degree in communication sciences and disorders (or appropriate prerequisite courses if the bachelor's degree is in another area) and an SLPA seminar and field experience available each semester through the speech-language pathology programs at the University of Colorado-Boulder, Metropolitan State University of Denver, and the University of Northern Colorado. During the field experience prior to CDE authorization a SLPA requires 50% weekly (at least 50% direct) supervision.

A CDE Authorized SLPA should receive:
30% weekly (at least 20% direct) supervision for the first 90 work days
20% weekly (at least 10% direct) supervision after the initial work period

Direct supervision means on-site, in-view observation and guidance by an SLP while an assigned activity is being performed. It is also recommended that an SLP supervise no more than 2 full-time SLPAs or 3 part-time SLPAs. Tele-supervision is an acceptable supervision model.

The supervising SLP must adhere to the CDE licensure requirements for continuing education. It is strongly recommended that supervising SLPs gain some continuing education in supervision/mentorship. Continuing education requirements can be met through CDE sponsored regional meetings, contact hours in supervision of SLPAs enrolled in personnel preparation programs, or graduate coursework in supervision.

What are some models of supervision?
It was suggested earlier that the SLP and SLPA work in tandem to fulfill roles and responsibilities of service delivery in school settings. The approach that best

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advances this goal is a mentorship model. In *Reflections & Guidelines for Preparation of SLPAs* (Moore & Pearson, 2006), the model seeks to not only encourage the SLP to function as a supervisor of the SLPA by orienting, documenting, and evaluating the acquisition of expected competencies, but also to provide a supportive context for learning as the SLPA develops and refines the knowledge and skills consistent with the roles and responsibilities of this position. The mentorship model is used in the SLPA seminar and field experience, but it is also encouraged as the SLPA is employed in the public schools. The mentor and the mentee experience benefits from the mentorship relationship. The SLPA is able to engage his/her scope of work in an atmosphere of trust and collaboration.

What strategies have speech-language pathologists (SLP) found to be effective in providing the recommended amount of supervision?

The key to guarantee that the appropriate amount of supervision is met is to schedule the time into the SLP's weekly schedule. The SLP can vary when in her week to provide the supervision so she can observe the SLPA work with every student.

What is necessary for an SLP to provide quality supervision of an SLPA?

<u>When in the SLP career is supervision an appropriate activity</u>?
The SLP supervisor of SLPAs must hold their National Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC's). It is recommended that SLPs have at least 3 years of experience prior to providing supervision to an SLPA. SLPs are limited to supervising 3 SLPAs.

<u>What knowledge and skills are necessary?</u>
1. Select and assign appropriate students to the SLPA.
2. Determine the nature of supervision that is appropriate for each SLPA.
3. Establish and maintain an effective relationship with the SLPA.
4. Direct the SLPA in following screening protocols.
5. Demonstrate for and participate with the SLPA in the educational process.
6. Direct the SLPA in following individualized intervention plans that have been developed by the speech-language pathologist.
7. Direct the SLPA in the maintenance of educational records.
8. Interact with the SLPA in planning and executing supervisory conferences.
9. Provide feedback to the SLPA regarding skills.
10. Assist the SLPA in developing skills of verbal reporting and assigned informal written reporting to the SLP.
11. Assist the SLPA in effectively selecting, preparing, and presenting ~~treatment~~ intervention materials and organizing educational environments.
12. Share information regarding ethical, legal, regulatory, and reimbursement aspects of professional practice.
13. Model and facilitate professional conduct.
14. Direct the SLPA in the implementation of research procedures, in-service training, and public relations programs.

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15. Train the SLPA to check and maintain equipment and to observe universal precautions.
16. Assist the SLPA in using appropriate language (oral and written) when interacting with students and others.
17. Establish a system of accountability for document use and supervision of the SLPA.

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2002). *Knowledge and skills for supervisors of speech-language pathology assistants* [Knowledge and Skills]. Available from www.asha.org/policy.

What building and district support will facilitate a productive and positive mentorship for the SLP and SLPA?
Districts can support SLP mentor supervisors by giving them the appropriate time that they need to provide adequate supervision as well as the planning, testing and IEP meetings for the students that the SLPA serves. The district can also support an SLP mentor by providing time for the SLP mentor to receive continuing education to increase his or her skills in supervision. Some districts provide stipends or extra pay for SLP supervisors.

Models of supervision
Districts have used SLPAs in a variety of ways. The most common is to have the SLPA support SLPs with high caseloads. The SLPA might work several days with different SLP supervisors. Another model is to place 2 SLPAs at different schools and have one SLP provide the supervision for both SLPAs.

The following are recommendations for supervising a SLPA. The SLP supervisor will complete adequate supervision for the SLPA while also providing the planning for student programming that the SLPA will follow while completing all assessments, writing IEPs and attending IEP meetings. For an SLPA who has his/her Authorization and has been in a district for more than 90 days and works 35 hours a week, the SLP should provide 3.5 hours of direct supervision and 3.5 hours of indirect supervision each week. To complete the other responsibilities, the SLP supervisor needs at least 7 hours a week. The SLP would spend approximately 40% of her time providing supervision for the SLPA and the programming for the students with SLI.

What roles and responsibilities does the SLP mentor/supervisor have with the SLPA?
Defining and describing the roles and responsibilities of the SLPA relative to the specific setting and characteristics of the students on the caseload
Each SLP mentor/supervisor must determine how best to utilize his/her SLPA based on the characteristics of the setting and the nature of the students on the caseload. There is no "one-size-fits-all" profile for how the SLP will mentor/supervise the SLPA. Rather, the SLP should develop a plan that outlines the

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specific roles and responsibilities of the SLPA consistent with the appropriate scope of SLPA work.

Creating the intervention plan for each student on the caseload and communicating the expectations involved in implementing the intervention plan
The SLP is responsible for creating the intervention plan based on assessment results including the speech-language goals and objectives, the desired outcomes, the service delivery model, and the frequency of service. The SLPA extends the services of the SLP through implementing interventions, thus she needs to know and understand the plan and be able to effectively use evidence-based approaches with students. Especially during SLPA training, but also throughout employment, the SLP is required to assess the level of understanding that the SLPA has regarding the intervention plan and selected intervention approach, and to provide an appropriate amount of guidance to the SLPA for her to successfully accomplish the intervention with each student.

Determining the amount and level of the tasks that each SLPA is competent to perform
The SLP is responsible for the services SLPAs provide to students. Each SLPA has her own knowledge and skill set as well as her own experiences and SLPA work history. It is incumbent on the SLP to know the background of the SLPA in order to determine which tasks are mastered and require minimal to no assistance, which tasks are developing and require some assistance, the tasks that are emerging and need demonstration and scaffolding, and those tasks that are new and not yet in the repertoire of the SLPA. The SLP is encouraged to develop a learning plan with the SLPA, so that the amount and level of assistance each task requires can be determined and shaped over time through developmental activities.

Enhancing the knowledge and skills of the SLPA through coaching to be effective in intervention procedures
Implicit in the mentor/supervision model is the motivation and tools that SLPs use to directly increase the knowledge and skills of the SLPA. In order to effectively coach the SLPA, SLPs need to build in time to provide a strong model and to watch and critique the SLPA. Coaching early on in the SLP-SLPA relationship will establish consistent and effective intervention services. Once the SLPA is confident and student outcomes are strong, the SLP is able to modify coaching as a primary activity.

Verifying accurate collection of student data for interpretation and making decisions
One area in particular that SLPAs may need support is in consistent collection and reporting of progress data. The SLP who coaches the SLPA on how to collect and report data will be able to use the data effectively for decision-making about goals and objectives for each student and for progress monitoring and reporting. Data review on a fixed schedule allows the SLP to establish and maintain a close

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relationship with the SLPA and a firm and clear grasp of the progress of each student so that goals and objectives are modified routinely.

Interpreting and summarizing the data to create accurate reporting of student outcomes

The SLP is the one who discusses progress with parents and other professionals, thus current knowledge about progress is necessary. She must have access to complete and accurate data in order to be able to interpret it for decisions about eligibility and the intervention plan. Thus, the SLP must mentor the SLPA on methods for collecting meaningful data that is aggregated across sessions.

Delegating clerical tasks, coordinating tasks, and material preparation

There are many tasks that the SLP completes during each day that do not involve direct work with students. Completing paperwork, entering student data into computer e-files, scheduling students, preparing materials, escorting students to and from classrooms, filing student information, gathering assessment tools, completing assessment protocols, putting materials away, and attending meetings. The SLPA is able to participate in all of these activities, freeing up time for the SLP to work more directly and more often with students. SLPs are often under the impression that the SLPA is the interventionist, while the SLP is the diagnostician. One way that SLPs may be able to increase their own work with students is to delegate these and other items to the SLPA.

Providing constructive feedback on the scope of work based on observation of the SLPA

The effectiveness of the SLP program depends on the success of both the SLP and the SLPA to enhance the progress of their students. It is the responsibility of the SLP to include evaluation of the SLPA as part of her primary responsibilities. An effective evaluation should be based on mutual goals and objectives that the SLP and SLPA together determine to be important at the beginning of each school year and at mid-year. These goals and objectives should be modified each year as the SLPA gains experience and confidence in her roles and responsibilities. When absent or emerging knowledge and skills are identified, the SLP determines the amount and level of coaching that is required for mastery.

What are some specific ways that SLPs have utilized SLPAs in public schools?
- Increasing the intensity of services for specific students in order to improve student outcomes;
- Increasing the number of students served through supervision;
- Extending services in rural settings;
- Providing additional practice to specific students in order to improve student outcomes;
- Creating smaller groups and 1:1 opportunities for students;
- Tailoring materials to suit student needs;
- Providing intervention services during assessments and staffings;

- Providing intervention services so that the SLP has time to consult with other members of the team including parents;

What do I do if I have an undergraduate degree that is not in Speech Language Hearing Sciences and want to become an SLPA?

Colorado has a way for individuals with a Bachelor's degree in a field other than in Speech Language Hearing Sciences to get an SLPA Authorization. The individual can enroll in the Speech Language Pathology Preparation program online through the University of Colorado Boulder or on campus programs at the Metropolitan State University of Denver, University of Northern Colorado, University of Colorado Boulder. The student would take the primary courses in Speech Language Hearing Sciences and the SLPA Course to have the educational requirements to apply for the CDE SLPA Authorization. The 24 credits include the following courses: Language Development, Phonetics, Speech Science, Speech Disorders, Language Disorders, Hearing Science, Audiological Evaluation, and Audiological Rehabilitation.

> Metropolitan State University of Denver. This on campus program may be completed in two to three semesters (full time). For More information, please see the website: http://www.msudenver.edu/cas/academics/speechlanguagehearingsciences/

> University of Colorado – Boulder. The online program takes 4 semesters to complete and the student takes 2 classes each semester. The on campus program may be completed in two to three semesters (full time)For more information, please see the website: http://slhs.colorado.edu/slpp-online or http://slhs.colorado.edu/undergraduate-curriculum

> University of Northern Colorado. This on campus program may be completed in two to three semesters (full time). Some courses are available online during the summer semester. For more information, please view the website: www.unco.edu/NHS/asls/MASLPReqUGPrep.htm

Completion of undergraduate prerequisite courses not only provides the required background for enrolling in the SLPA course and field experience, it also prepares the individual for application to a graduate program in speech-language pathology. The requirements for admission and coursework requirements vary for each graduate program in Speech Language Pathology.

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