

FAQs About Working With SLPAs in Illinois!

1. A Brief History About Speech Language Pathology Support Personnel:
 - a. Speech Language Pathology Paraprofessionals (SLPPs)
 - i. ISBE initiated the SLPP program in the early 1970s. This program allowed those who had earned Bachelor-level degrees in Communicative Disorders/Sciences to seek employment *in Illinois schools only*, with the purpose of supporting school-based SLPs.
 - ii. Districts were required to apply to ISBE annually for a waiver and approval for hiring SLPPs. Additionally, districts were required to continue posting for an SLP position until a certified SLP could be hired. This meant that if an SLP was hired during the year, the SLPP could potentially be dismissed.
 - iii. SLPP employment by school districts was meant to be temporary, hence the need for districts to apply annually. It was also meant to be a way for Bachelor-level graduates to work until they were accepted into graduate programs.
 - iv. Though the SLPP program provided some support for SLPs, there were many inconsistencies and challenges:
 1. Most SLPPs had no clinical practicum experience.
 2. SLPPs were allowed to have their own caseload of up to 60 students.
 3. The supervising SLP's caseload was reduced by 15%; however, they were responsible not only for their own caseload (meetings, paperwork, etc.), but they were also responsible for the SLPP's caseload (i.e. meetings, paperwork, etc.). This meant that the SLP could have, in essence, a caseload of up to 111 students.
 - v. The SLPP program was terminated by ISBE in August, 2014.
 - b. Speech Language Pathology Assistants (SLPAs)
 - i. ASHA developed the SLPA Scope of Practice between the early to mid 2000s until its completion in 2013. As of July 2020, there are new ASHA standards for SLPAs.
 - ii. ASHA now offers the opportunity for SLPAs to apply for the C-SLPA certification at <https://www.asha.org/certification/apply-for-slp-assistants-certification/>. You can find out more about SLPA certification with the following link--
<https://www.asha.org/Certification/About-Assistants-Certification/>.
 - iii. Both ASHA and the Illinois Speech Language Pathology and Audiology Practice Act allow for those with Bachelors degrees in Communicative Disorders, and those who have completed a 2-year SLPA program (Associates degree) to seek employment as SLPAs in the schools **as long as all requirements have been fulfilled** (see ASHA Standards for SLPAs, and the Illinois Speech Language Pathology and Audiology Practice Act for educational, clinical, and licensure requirements). SLPA training programs must include a minimum of 100 hours of supervised clinical field experience. The Practice Act can be accessed by clicking on this link--
<https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=1325>.
 - iv. An IDFPR license is required to work in Illinois as an SLPA.
 - v. SLPAs can be employed by districts, eliminating the requirements to apply to ISBE for waivers/approval and to continue posting for SLP positions. Based on information from the College of DuPage's SLPA program website: "On average, the SLPA salary is approximately 60-70% of an SLP's salary in the same setting with commensurate experience."

- vi. Qualified SLPAs are able to work in a variety of settings in Illinois, including schools, early intervention, pediatric clinical and rehabilitation facilities as long as they are supervised by a qualified SLP; opportunities in home health, hospital settings or caring for adult patients may be limited at this time due to reimbursement issues.
- vii. SLPAs...
 - 1. ...CAN have their own workloads, but they CANNOT have their own caseloads.
 - 2. ...can provide a significant amount of support to SLPs without increasing the SLP's caseload; see "**Responsibilities and Activities of School-based SLPs and SLPAs**". This document shows most (if not all) of the activities for which school-based SLPs are responsible; the highlighted activities show those activities that can be performed by an SLPA to support the supervising SLP.
 - 3. ...share the caseload and workload of the supervising SLP; this means that both the SLP and the SLPA know and work with the students, though not necessarily simultaneously. The SLP is ultimately responsible for the provision of services, and should be able to speak about the needs and skills of all students on his/her caseload. This does not necessarily include students receiving MTSS/RTI services, as these students are not technically on the caseload.
 - 4. ...can provide services, and those services can be billed to Medicaid as long as they are "...under the direct supervision..." of a qualified SLP; see 225 ILCS 110/Section 8.8 of the Illinois Speech Language Pathology and Audiology Practice Act for details. You may also want to review the Medicaid Handbook for Local Education Agencies, Chapter U-200 at <https://www.illinois.gov/hfs/SiteCollectionDocuments/092818LEAHdbkPolicyAudiologyRefFinal.pdf>, specifically U-210.12 Speech/Language Services, page 23. The SLP must sign all documentation; the SLPA may co-sign along with the SLP as a matter of clear record-keeping, but it is not necessary.
 - 5. ...typically work with students whose disorders and needs are less complex, giving time to the SLP to work with students who present with more challenging issues. A more experienced SLPA may be able to provide services to other students at the discretion of the supervising SLP (be aware, however, of the restrictions pertaining to swallowing/feeding therapy).
- viii. Refer to the Practice Act for SLPA Roles and Responsibilities, as well as for activities that are not within an SLPA's scope of practice.
- ix. The SLP and SLPA must set aside time to discuss shared students; this can be considered, at least in part, the indirect supervision of the SLPA. Documentation of SLPA performance is required (see documentation sample).

2. Working with an SLPA! Here's an **example** of how it might work:

- a. Direct supervision--first 90 days of working with an SLPA = 30% of student contact time; thereafter 20% of student contact time.
- b. Develop a daily/weekly schedule *as if you will be the only person working with the students* (just in case the SLPA would be assigned elsewhere).
- c. An SLPA is assigned to work with an SLP two days per week, let's say on A days and B days.
- d. The SLP's typical day has eleven 30-45 minute time slots for therapy/testing. In the morning on A day, the SLP scheduled a 1st grade group, followed by a kindergarten group, then two groups of self-contained students (push-in services), and then two 2nd grade groups. The SLPA

worked with the 1st grade and kindergarten groups--two 30-minute groups--which meant during the first 90 days, the SLP supervised her for 9 minutes at the beginning of the first group and 9 minutes at the end of the second group. This gave the SLP 42 minutes in between the two groups to observe other students in classrooms, complete some testing, or if students were not available, the SLP worked on indirect activities (i.e. paperwork, reports, etc.). After the 90 days, supervision time was reduced to 20% of student contact time: 6 minutes at the beginning of the first group, and 6 minutes at the end of the second group, adding 6 minutes to the 42 minutes for the SLP. The SLP now had 48 minutes of time to do other tasks that he/she would not have had without the SLPA support.

- e. The morning continued with the SLP pushing in services to a self-contained classroom where he/she worked with several students. What was the SLPA doing during this time? She was either screening students for the SLP, doing her planning for the rest of the day or for her groups the next day, or preparing materials for therapy sessions.
- f. Upon the SLP's return from pushing in services to a classroom, the SLPA worked with two more groups before lunch--two 2nd grade groups, and again the SLP supervised at the beginning of one session and the end of the second, which again gave time in between to work with other students (making up missed minutes, observing in classrooms, testing).
- g. The same procedure was followed for the six afternoon groups. This provided the SLP with three more 42 (or 48) minute segments of time to accomplish other activities. In total for the day, the SLP supervised the SLPA for 90 minutes, and had 3.5 hours to do other activities. Total SLPA-Student Contact Time = 300 min/day ÷ 30% = 90 minutes of supervision of SLPA + 210 minutes (or 3.5 hours) for the SLP's other activities. A and C days were pretty much the same, so the SLP worked with the same students as the SLPA, just on different days.
- h. Indirect Supervision--Indirect supervision can be accomplished during a reflection of student performance after the last group. A documentation form (available on ISHA's website, under "School Affairs-->SLPs and SLPAs") was created and the SLPA and SLP discussed and rated the SLPA's performance during each group. This time provided an opportunity for the SLPA to ask questions, confirm her plans with each student/group, and for the SLP to provide support and feedback meant to build confidence and establish a positive working relationship with the SLPA.