

Ethical Practices in Addressing Vacancies in NC School Settings

The NCBOESLPA provides this guidance in addressing vacancies of speech-language pathologists in NC School settings. Per federal and state law, it is the responsibility of the administration in the Public School Unity (PSU) to provide speech-language therapy services for students who are determined eligible by IEP Teams. With recent and critical shortages in the school setting, all means to fill vacancies and provide those services should be considered. The Board considers the following means to be appropriate:

- The primary and optimal means to provide speech-language therapy services in school settings is to employ full-time, licensed speech-language pathologists. In the current competitive job market, the PSU may need to consider monetary incentives (i.e., sign-on bonuses, retention bonuses, and additional supplements) to recruit and retain these valuable and essential employees. Other non-monetary incentives (i.e., paid time off, recognition, special perks, and continuing education support) may also help to provide an appealing work environment in which to attract employees.
- An alternative means may be to contract with outside agencies or companies to provide speech-language pathologists to serve students. Some students will require the intervention of a traditional, face-to-face speech-language pathologist, while some students may be appropriately served through telepractice services, so long as the speech-language pathologist meets all requirements as stated in 21 NCAC 64.0219.
- The appropriate use of Speech-Language Pathology Assistants in the school setting should also be considered to help alleviate vacancies and challenging workloads.

North Carolina employs a hybrid caseload/workload approach to determining the workload of the school-based speech-language pathologist. A caseload cap of 50 currently exists in North Carolina Schools. If the caseload of an individual speech-language pathologist exceeds 50, the administration of the PSU must request a waiver (including a completed workload calculation form) from the Department of Public Instruction, specifically the Consultant for Speech-Language Pathology. If a waiver request is not approved, an action plan to alleviate the overage must be established between the administration and the Consultant.

*The workload calculation form is useful to the administration in understanding the actual work of the speech-language pathologist, creating equitable workloads across the PSU, and in determining the number of speech-language pathologists required to serve the population of the district.

It is never the responsibility of the individual speech-language pathologist to resolve personnel issues and shortages, but rather the administration of the PSU. If all means are exhausted and vacancies are unable to be filled, the PSU shall consider providing compensatory services in the future to satisfy the requirements of the student's IEP.