

## **TSHA Proposed Statewide Eligibility Templates for Public Schools 1999 – 2007**

In 1999 Judy Erwin, TSHA V.P. for Professional Services and the Texas State Education Advocacy Leader appointee to ASHA offered an open meeting at the TSHA Convention for all professionals concerned about the high caseloads and shortage of speech-language pathologists in the schools. The meeting drew more than 40 interested SLPs. The consensus of those in attendance was that the first point of attack needed to be that of appropriate identification of those children truly needing the services of a speech-language pathologist. Ten SLPs volunteered to serve on a TSHA task force to develop eligibility guidelines in the four areas recognized in IDEA: articulation, language, voice and fluency.

The task force developed 4 templates over the course of 3 years: Articulation, SI Language Only, Language with a Cognitive Component, and Severe Language. In 2003, two new task forces began work on Voice and Fluency which were completed in 2005.

Because it was determined that the templates require training to properly implement, TSHA developed a system of 'train the trainer' to provide statewide access to the templates. Applicants were solicited from each region across the state (consistent with the geographical boundaries set by the 20 Texas Education Service Centers) from which one (sometimes two) SLPs were chosen to receive intensive training in each of the 6 templates developed. Ideally this would translate to a total of 120 TOTs. However, applications were not received from all regions, so a TOT from a neighboring region may be called upon to provide training.

To date, TOTs have received training in five of the six templates – the last group of TOT (Fluency) was trained at the March 2007 TSHA Convention in Houston. TOTs provide ongoing support to SLPs and districts trained and are responsible for providing data feedback to the TOT coordinator. TOTs maintain contact with the original core trainers via an annual meeting at TSHA Convention and statewide videoconference meetings, as scheduled. Additionally, basic presentations on the principles of all six templates and highlights of template value are offered for special education administrators at the conferences of the Texas Council of Administrators for Special Education (TCASE) twice a year as well as regional meetings as requested by a region or a district. Recently the SLP Vacancy Task Force has offered similar sessions at the conferences of Elementary Principals and Superintendents.

Plano ISD implemented the Articulation Eligibility Template four years ago and the process was recognized by the Texas Education Agency as a 2005 Promising Practice. Anecdotal feedback from special education directors, district administrators and SLPs has been positive. Although districts implementing the templates are evidencing lower caseloads (initially perceived to be our only/main goal), the feedback also suggests that children are being more 'appropriately' identified (a fact greatly appreciated by SLPs). SLPs report the teacher/parent training segments of the manuals have been very helpful in providing the information needed to ensure more appropriate referrals, therefore fewer unnecessary evaluations. In addition, pre-referral intervention suggestions presented to student support teams is consistent with providing some classroom intervention prior to a special education referral for some students.

In an effort to address the growing cultural diversity in our state, the task force on Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Issues developed a document that was approved by the TSHA executive board in November of 2005. The content of this document will be infused into the six templates mentioned above in order to guide appropriate identification for those individuals who are considered to be English Language Learners. The Articulation Eligibility Template "companion" is expected to be completed by the spring of 2008, with the other eligibility templates to follow shortly thereafter.

The need for special/additional guidelines for preschool age children is currently under discussion. It is expected that this information would also be infused into the existing six templates.