



# PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Directors, Exceptional Children Programs  
Speech-Language Pathologists

FROM: Mary N. Watson, Director *MNW*  
Exceptional Children Division

DATE: October 26, 2006

RE: Speech-Language Pathologists and English Language Learners

The Exceptional Children Division offers the attached document to assist in clarifying the role of the speech-language pathologist with the English Language Learner population. Currently there may be inconsistency in how LEAs and individual speech-language pathologists manage this population. It is hoped that the following statement will support the uniform management of this growing population. It has been developed with the assistance of the office of Multicultural Affairs at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and is endorsed by the Board of Directors of the North Carolina Speech, Hearing and Language Association.

If you have questions please contact Perry Flynn, the Speech-Language Pathology Consultant to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, at [pfflynn@uncg.edu](mailto:pfflynn@uncg.edu). We hope you will find the following information of value in your LEA.

MNW/PFF:pf

### EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN DIVISION

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## **Services for English Language Learners by North Carolina School Speech-Language Pathologists**

Assessment of and intervention for English Language Learners is often a challenge for the speech-language pathologist (SLP). While there are a number of resources available to provide direction and help to the school SLP, including documents published by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association at <http://www.asha.org/about/leadership-projects/multicultural/>, the actual practice of assessing and intervening with these students may still be problematic. The following information on assessment and intervention is presented to help clarify some of the ambiguities of assessment and intervention for English Language Learners.

### Assessment

Not every student who enters school speaking a language other than English should be referred for assessment by the SLP. SLPs in schools serve students who are identified as having disorders of speech and/or language and who are in need of special education services. Students who are suspected of having a speech-language disorder, not merely a difference, are to be referred to the SLP for a comprehensive assessment. The comprehensive assessment must include speech, language and related educational areas using assessments determined by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team as is required and expected best practice for every student who is referred to the SLP. The assessment components include (1) a parent interview focusing on the language history of the student, including the amount and context of exposure to languages in the student's environment; (2) a check for speech and language developmental milestones; (3) a comparison of the student to his/her siblings and similarly educated peers, keeping in mind that each student's bilingual experience is unique and that it is often not appropriate to make these comparisons; and (4) the gathering of additional information as

appropriate. If standardized tests are available in the student's native language, they should be administered. The results of standardized measures, however, should be considered carefully, as many tests are not culturally sensitive, may not have been normed on a population representative of the student's cultural and linguistic background, and may not have been appropriately validated.

To assure that the assessment is appropriately conducted, with conversation, questions, and responses adequately conveyed and understood, a bilingual SLP or educational interpreter is required. At all times, care must be taken to insure confidentiality of all parties involved in the assessment process. It is strongly recommended that the SLP provide training, helping the interpreter understand the assessment process.

### Intervention

Following the comprehensive evaluation, eligibility for special education services is determined by the IEP Team using data from the comprehensive assessment. Once eligibility for speech-language services is determined, the question of how to provide appropriate therapeutic-educational interventions for the student becomes the focus of concern. To the extent possible, a bilingual SLP or educational interpreter provided by the school system is to be included during intervention sessions, particularly for those students who speak no English. Determining the language for intervention services depends on the student's native language skills and the student's English language skills.

The school system's English as a Second Language (ESL) program offers support to the English Language Learner in the acquisition of English, the language of school. The ESL services and the other classroom instruction are augmented by the special education services offered by the SLP. Generally, the SLP begins intervention in the student's native language and moves into English only as the student's use of English increases.

The only service to be performed by the educational interpreter is interpreting. At no time is the interpreter to provide assistance to the student without the SLP present, and that assistance is to be limited to interpreting. Some persons who may serve as interpreters are foreign language students at institutions of higher education, members of church or social groups and, as a last resort, parents, siblings, or other students in the school. Teleconference and other interpreter services (available at <http://www.catiweb.org>) may be helpful resources. Some educational interpreters may be willing to volunteer their services; however, the school system needs to be prepared to pay for services as needed. Without question and in keeping with federal mandates and professional and ethical practices, any person who provides education and educationally-related services to students with disabilities in any capacity must be approved by the school system, must understand that all information concerning students is to be kept confidential, and must understand the consequences for not holding student information confidential.

#### Summary

It is necessary to have a bilingual SLP or an interpreter when performing speech-language evaluations with non-English speakers. To the extent possible, a bilingual SLP or an educational interpreter is to be used during intervention.

It is incumbent on the SLP to provide services to English Language Learners in a culturally and linguistically sensitive manner.