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New Department of Education Guidance Issued to Ensure Access to Speech-Language Pathology Services for Children With Autism

ASHA Advocated Strongly for Department of Education Action

(Rockville, MD – July 21, 2015) In response to reports that a growing number of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may not be receiving needed speech and language services, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) has issued a new guidance to school systems nationwide recognizing the importance of speech-language pathology services and the necessary role of a speech-language pathologist in both evaluation and treatment of children with ASD.

In particular, ED’s Office of Special Education Programs noted concern that speech-language pathologists and other appropriate professionals are not being included in evaluation and eligibility determinations under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, which ensures the availability of free appropriate public education to all eligible children with disabilities, or in meetings to develop the individualized education plan (IEP) or individualized family service plan (IFSP) as required under IDEA, Parts B and C, respectively. Part C ensures that eligible infants and toddlers with a disability have access to early intervention services that are designed to meet their developmental needs.

In its guidance, ED states that some IDEA programs may be including applied behavior analysis (ABA) therapists exclusively without including, or considering input from, speech-language pathologists and other professionals who provide different types of therapies that may be appropriate for children with ASD. ED clarifies that ABA therapy is just one methodology used to address the needs of children with ASD—and reminds states and local programs to ensure that decisions regarding services are based on the unique needs of each child.

“We very much appreciate this guidance and believe that it will serve to ensure that children receive the appropriate treatment they deserve based on their individual needs,” said Judith L. Page, PhD, CCC-SLP, 2015 president of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. “The specialized education, training and experience of speech-language pathologists make them a key part of the team that evaluates and treats a child with autism spectrum disorder.”

About the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

ASHA is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 182,000 audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students. Audiologists specialize in preventing and assessing hearing and balance disorders as well as providing audiologic treatment, including hearing aids. Speech-language pathologists identify, assess, and treat speech and language problems, including swallowing disorders. www.asha.org/.

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