

THERAPIST QUALIFICATION STATEMENT

*Compiled by Joan C. Arvedson, PhD, CCC-SLP, BCS-S, ASHA Fellow
and Emily Homer, MS, CCC-SLP*

Feeding Matters understands that feeding disorders can be complex and difficult for parents and school administration/staff. It is hoped that the information in this brief document may be helpful for parents to identify SLPs and other therapists in schools who have qualifications to work with students who have feeding disorders. Parents are encouraged to communicate with Feeding Matters to raise additional questions or share their experiences that may be helpful to other families. Feeding Matters is making a commitment to parents to continue gathering information that can be shared with others.

How does a parent or caregiver know if a school-based Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) has the knowledge and skills to address pediatric feeding disorders?

SLPs are hired by school districts to address the needs of students identified as speech and/or language impaired. Each state has its own requirements for licensure and teacher certification for all professionals that include SLPs, Occupational Therapists (OT), Physical Therapists (PT), and school nurses. In some states, school SLPs are exempt from licensure requirements and meet a different standard through the state department of education. These standards may be different from what is required for medically based SLPs, or those in private practice. However, in most states the requirements are the same. There is no standard currently set for SLPs involved with children who have pediatric feeding disorders in any setting. Pediatric feeding disorders can be dangerous for students experiencing them, and therefore, it is of the utmost importance that SLPs who are treating children in schools have the experience and knowledge necessary to work with children who struggle to eat or those who may be at risk for aspiration or other health complications even when they do not struggle.

Regardless of the state licensure and/or teacher certification requirements for SLPs practicing in the schools, the minimal standard for SLPs to be involved in evaluation and intervention with children who have feeding and swallowing disorders is the American Speech-Language and Hearing Association (ASHA) Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC) and a graduate level course in dysphagia along with supervised practicum. However, that requirement does not translate into a major focus within that course on pediatrics. While most meet the minimum criteria, there may be some SLPs in schools who graduated before a course and practicum focusing on dysphagia (swallowing) was required. This situation would then require additional coursework and practicum to meet the minimum standards to address dysphagia.

According to ASHA, SLPs have an ethical responsibility to obtain the knowledge and skills needed to perform their duties that are within the scope of practice for SLPs. In order to work with students who have feeding disorders, it may be necessary for the school-based SLP to seek out additional coursework, professional development, and mentoring which have a pediatric focus. In addition, school districts have a responsibility to support professionals working with students by providing training opportunities in areas of need in order for them to perform their jobs, especially when it is related to health and safety.

It takes a team effort to plan and carry out intervention with students who have swallowing and feeding disorders. The team should include collaboration with the SLP, OT, PT, school nurse, classroom teacher, school administrator, cafeteria manager, classroom assistant/paraprofessional, and parent(s). The core team of SLP, OT, and school nurse will often be responsible for providing

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training for the other team members (classroom staff, cafeteria manager, and administrator). When school-based SLPs do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to address swallowing and feeding, they need to be trained by the SLPs managing the child's swallowing and feeding to assist in monitoring implementation of the plan and watching for signs of possible aspiration, along with other possible oral skills and pulmonary problems. Decision-making and responsibility would remain with the core team and the trained SLP. For more information on this topic, contact the American Speech-Language and Hearing Association. (www.asha.org)

How does a parent know if a school-based Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) has the knowledge and skills to address pediatric feeding disorders?

- There is not a single standard, which makes it difficult to determine competencies of school personnel for working with children who have feeding disorders.
- Most SLPs have a mandate in schools to focus on speech and language impairments. Swallowing and feeding are in their Scope of Practice.
- ASHA does have documents that describe “knowledge and skills” needed for SLPs to evaluate and provide therapy for children with feeding disorders.
- Team approach is desired so that no single therapist works in isolation.

What should parents ask school administrative personnel?

- What procedures does your district have in place to set up and implement a safe feeding plan for my child?
- Will a trained SLP be responsible for setting up and monitoring implementation of my child's safe swallowing and feeding plan?
- What has the district done to train personnel to address swallowing and feeding?

What should parents ask the school-based (SLP) responsible for the student's mealtimes?

- Tell us about your experience with children who have feeding disorders.
- Did your training include a graduate level course that focused on dysphagia (swallowing problems)? How much of your graduate course covered pediatric dysphagia?
- Did you have an additional course that focused on pediatrics or have you attended professional development on identifying and treating pediatric dysphagia?
- Do you have a team working together to monitor safety during mealtimes? (Example of the team would be: SLP, OT, PT, nurse, teacher)
- How will you determine my child's safe feeding plan for mealtimes, including breakfast, lunch time and/or snack time?
- Will you monitor the implementation of my child's plan to make sure that it is being followed correctly?

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Feeding Matters is a non-profit organization that provides support, educational tools and resources to the families of children with pediatric feeding disorders. We are not medical doctors or medical advisors and we do not give medical advice. You should consult your doctor and other medical providers for medical advice. Feeding Matters does its best to provide accurate and helpful information through its materials but does not warrant or guarantee the accuracy of the information. In addition, much of the information is provided by third-parties. We are not responsible for this content. We urge you to speak to your medical professionals before relying of any information contained in our resources.

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The above statements provide information to caregivers, who are recommended to discuss their specific situations with professionals who know the child and caregivers. Dr. Arvedson is not responsible for decisions made for individual children nor for outcomes from any interventions that may be undertaken.

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