

**SLP COMMITTEE REPORT
SURVEY REGARDING 2013 TRANSFER OF
SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS TO
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT**

PREAMBLE

In the spring of 2012, the government mandated that speech-language pathologists (SLPs) working in schools and the Talk with Me/Parle-moi program be transferred from the Extra-Mural Program, under the Department of Health to the school districts with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD). The turnaround time was short and EECD, still grappling with the amalgamation of the school districts, had limited opportunity to prepare for the transfer of SLPs with Talk With Me/Parle-moi and those serving the school-aged population. By the time the transfer occurred in January 2013, many challenges became apparent across the province, and it was clear that there were strong feelings about the changes that occurred. In 2015, the Speech-Language Pathology Committee initiated a survey targeting SLPs affected by the transfer to Education, both the group of clinicians transferred to EECD, and the group of clinicians who refer children to the schools. The survey (statements listed on page 2) was translated and e-mailed to SLPs working in hospitals, schools, and in the Talk With Me/Parle-moi program.

SURVEY RESPONSE RATE

	Anglophone	Francophone	Total
Hospital/Hôpital	17	5	22
Education	27	9	36
Talk with Me/Parle-moi	9	2	11
Other	1	0	1
TOTAL	54	16	70

The survey used a five-point Likert scale to respond to the statements, running from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'. There were statements that applied exclusively to one setting or another, so there was also a 'Not Applicable' option for those cases. In analyzing the results, we found that there was a wide range of opinion on many of the statements, with significant clusters of respondents choosing 'Strongly Agree', while a comparable cluster of respondents chose 'Strongly Disagree' on the same item. Because of this, we felt that reporting averages would conceal the character of this polarization of opinion. In order to retain these extremes of opinion, we performed a qualitative analysis, the results of which follow.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Demographic question regarding work setting and geographic location.
2. The information that I send EECD concerning my clients will be adequately reviewed when making decisions about service delivery.
3. I understand the transfer of information or referral process for EECD SLP services well enough to explain it to parents.
4. The process of transferring information or referring my clients to EECD requires improvement.
5. My employer (EECD/school district) provides the staff with professional development that supports its service delivery model (i.e., RTI).
6. My employer (EECD/school district) understands the role of the EECD SLP.
7. Our EECD/school district supervisors/managers use clear lines of communication with our staff.
8. The information our EECD/school district supervisors/managers provides to us is reliable.
9. I have the opportunity to influence decisions that affect my practice under EECD/school district.
10. I am satisfied with communication/collaboration with my health/EECD counterparts since the transfer to Education.

Q2. The information that I send to EECD concerning my clients will be adequately reviewed when making decisions about service delivery:

	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Not Applicable¹
Anglophones²	35%	25%	8%	31%
Francophones	41%	0%	12%	47%

¹This question targeted hospital-based SLPs.

²Totals do not equal 100% due to rounding of numbers.

Comments from respondents:

Some respondents in hospital workplace settings voiced concerns regarding the process of transferring information, specifically that classroom teachers and resource teachers would replace the SLP's former role of receiving and screening referrals. Others were unsure or concerned about the effect of a shortage of SLPs in schools.

Q3. I understand the transfer of information or referral process for EECD SLP services well enough to explain it to parents.

	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Not Applicable¹
Anglophones	61%	16%	16%	8%
Francophones	71%	12%	6%	12%

¹This question targeted hospital-based SLPs.

²Totals do not equal 100% since some respondents did not reply to this question or numbers were rounded.

Comments from respondents:

A respondent expressed concern regarding the process changing from year to year. A number of respondents working in school settings commented that the transfer of information or referral process is inefficient in their opinion.

Q4. The process of transferring information or referring my clients to EECD requires improvement.

	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Not Applicable¹
Anglophones²	63%	14%	8%	16%
Francophones²	35%	0%	35%	29%

¹This question targeted hospital-based SLPs.

²Totals do not equal 100% since some respondents did not reply to this question and numbers were rounded.

Comments from respondents:

Preschool service providers mentioned that they should be able to refer directly to the school-based SLPs. They stated that the process as agreed upon was lengthy and was not followed consistently. School-based respondents felt that the process was either inefficient or inconsistent.

Q5. My employer (EECD/school district) provides the staff with professional development that supports its service delivery model (i.e., RtI).

	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Not Applicable ¹
Anglophones	40%	20%	14%	26%
Francophones ²	24%	24%	18%	35%

¹This question targeted school-based SLPs so was not applicable to all survey respondents..

²Totals do not equal 100% since some respondents did not reply to this question and totals were rounded.

Comments from respondents:

EECD service providers described a number of concerns, including: limited availability of topics, outdated and/or irrelevant information, limited numbers of staff permitted to attend, and no SLP input.

Q6. My employer (EECD/school district) understands the role of the EECD SLP.

	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Not Applicable ¹
Anglophones	14%	48%	14%	24%
Francophones	29%	29%	18%	24%

¹This question targeted school-based SLPs so was not applicable to all survey respondents.

Comments from respondents:

EECD SLPs voiced numerous concerns related to the employer’s lack of understanding of the SLP scope of practice and their failure to acknowledge the importance of the SLPs’ skill set in supporting academics. Several respondents pointed out that the Department of EECD has a good understanding of the SLP role, while District level staff do not. Decisions that have an effect on the SLPs’ practice are made without consultation.

Q7. Our EECD/school district supervisors/managers use clear lines of communication with our staff.

	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Not Applicable ¹
Anglophones	22%	42%	12%	24%
Francophones ²	59%	18%	12%	12%

¹This question targeted school-based SLPs. Only Anglophone EECD SLPs provided comments to this question.

²Totals do not equal 100% due to rounding.

Comments from respondents:

The following themes emerged from the comments:

- top down system lacking collaboration with SLPs

- some SLPs expressed the feeling that communication is often last minute and indirect, and perceived to be an afterthought
- responses are not timely (e.g., e-mails, meeting requests) with some respondents expressing the feeling that they are not being respected
- some respondents mentioned that communication was enhanced when located in District Office/Education Centre
- lines of communication blurred/not always clear

Q8. The information our EECD/school district supervisors/ managers provides to us is reliable.

	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Not Applicable¹
Anglophones	31%	17%	29%	23%
Francophones²	59%	18%	12%	12%

¹This question targeted school-based SLPs so was not applicable to all survey respondents.

²Totals do not equal 100% due to rounding of numbers.

Comments from respondents:

- In some districts the supervisors are not familiar with collective agreements regarding the supervision of rehab assistants.
- Districts with multiple Education Centres, each with their own supervisor, often gave SLPs conflicting messages

Q9. I have the opportunity to influence decisions that affect my practice under EECD/school district.

	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Not Applicable¹
Anglophones	30%	36%	12%	22%
Francophones	53%	6%	6%	35%

¹This question targeted school-based SLPs so was not applicable for all survey respondents.

Comments:

- At best, SLPs expressed having limited decision-making power aside from recommending purchases of clinical materials and scheduling.
- Some SLPs stated that it was difficult not having a supervisor who was an SLP.

Q10. I am satisfied with communication/collaboration with my health/EECD counterparts since the transfer to Education.

	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Not Applicable
Anglophones	27%	53%	14%	6%
Francophones	35%	12%	41%	12%

This statement targeted all SLPs surveyed.

Comments:

Survey respondents described the following:

- systemic problems/issues
- lack of collaboration
- poor communication
- poor understanding of school SLP role
- understaffing results in difficulties in communicating and collaborating with colleagues
- reduced work hours for new hires (from 37.5 to 36.25 hrs/wk) results in a disparity in working conditions with less time to complete assigned work including the communication and collaboration piece
- referral no longer coming directly to SLP results in delays in some areas
- non SLP supervisors results in less direct communication between departments

DISCUSSION

Comments from survey respondents highlight significant differences between regions, as well as between linguistic groups. Large discrepancies were noted between Anglophone and francophone respondents on all questions targeting school-based SLPs (i.e. Questions 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9):

- Q5 – Anglophone SLPs (40%) were happier with the professional development offered compared to francophones (24%).
- Q6 – Both anglophone and francophone SLPs reported that a small percentage of supervisors understood their role. However, twice as many francophone SLPs (29%) compared to anglophone staff (14%) indicated that their supervisors understood their role.
- Q7 – The majority of francophones (59%) stated that their supervisors/managers used clear lines of communication, while a minority of anglophones (22%) expressed that opinion.
- Q8 - Less than 1/3 of anglophones (31%) felt information provided by supervisors/managers was reliable; more francophones (59%) reported the same.

- Q9 - significantly fewer anglophones (30%) compared to francophones (53%) felt they could influence decisions that affect their practice.

Speech-language pathologists in some offices/Education Centres reported a better working relationship between service providers and fewer respondents voiced concerns regarding communication and supervision. However, the data was too limited to perform an in-depth analysis within and across districts.

Some SLPs reported being pulled from regular job duties to perform other functions that increase SLP scope of practice without adding human resources to support this increase, having an impact on the regular workload.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While a number of recommendations emerged from the analysis requiring follow-up, most were rooted in issues around inadequate processes, sharing of information and communication breakdowns. These included the need:

- to clarify of roles and responsibilities of SLPs within settings
- to hold regular meetings, both within office and across sectors
- to ensure equitable human resource allocation across offices
- to provide discipline-specific supervision and support
- to reduce barriers hindering seamless care of children moving from preschool to school SLP services
- to respect professional scope of practice and expertise of SLPs
- to allow SLPs to influence decision making that has an impact on clinical practice