



Highlighting PIC Work...

The Personnel Improvement Center (PIC) has been working with the National Coalition on Personnel Shortages (Coalition) (www.specialedshortages.org) for several years to address recruitment and retention issues for related service providers. See the PIC home page (www.personnelcenter.org) for links to recorded webinars on recruiting and retaining related service personnel.

PIC work in the states of Texas and Nevada has resulted in plans that are underway to provide distance education coursework for prospective candidates to receive Masters-level training as SLPs. The work has been led at the state level and includes the identification of a cohort of candidates in Local Education Agencies and Part C programs who are seeking full Speech Language Pathology certification.

The PIC has also worked with Nevada to assist in defining and implementing state and local guidelines for the use of telepractice for related service providers in rural areas.

About Us...

We are the National Center to Improve Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Personnel for Children with Disabilities (Personnel Improvement Center), a federally funded technical assistance and dissemination project, created on October 1, 2008 through a cooperative agreement, H325C080001, between the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the U.S. Department of Education.



SPRING 2011

IN THIS BRIEF...

You will learn about the strategies states, local school districts, and Part C programs are using to recruit and retain fully qualified related services personnel.

STRATEGIES FOR THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED RELATED SERVICE PROVIDERS

by Eve Müller, Ph.D.

The recruitment and retention of qualified related service providers remains a challenge for many states and localities. Based on examples drawn from around the country (most gleaned from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA] 2008 data on recruitment and retention) and the PIC's involvement with states and the National Coalition on Personnel Shortages in Special Education and Related Services, this practice brief provides suggestions for activities to improve recruitment and retention of qualified related service providers. Additional details pertaining to many of the examples cited can be found on ASHA's website at <http://www.asha.org/careers/recruitment/schools/>.

RECRUITMENT TO THE FIELD AND POSITION

Financial Incentives

More and more states and localities are offering tuition waivers for qualified related service providers who agree to work in school-based settings for two or more years. For example:

- The University of Southern California has received several grants from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to provide scholarships to occupational therapy (OT) students who agree to enroll in one or more electives pertaining to school-based OT, as well as partner with school districts for two years.
- North Carolina's state-level Speech Language Pathology (SLP) consultant recently initiated a tuition reimbursement program for SLPs who agree to work in North Carolina public schools. During its

second year, the program was expanded to include both OT and physical therapy (PT) students.

- In 2005, Maryland passed legislation requiring the Higher Education Commission to award Economic Development Grants to eligible SLP applicants.
- The Oklahoma State Department of Education provides tuition reimbursement for SLPs in exchange for a commitment to work with IDEA-eligible students in Oklahoma for one year per semester of reimbursement.

Loan forgiveness provides another option. For example:

- Wyoming passed legislation in 2006 that provides eligible SLPs and other health care providers loan forgiveness of up to \$10,000 per year.

ASHA reports that states and districts are increasingly using salary supplements to attract qualified related service providers, with at least 10 states having enacted salary supplement legislation and more than 70 districts in 20 states adopting this approach. For example:

- Virginia's Chesterfield School District negotiated extended contracts for SLPs so they could continue working with students during the summer, as well as secured 5% salary bonuses for SLPs and audiologists with ASHA certification.
- The bonuses awarded in Maryland's Frederick County Public Schools and



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Arizona's Page Unified School District for National Board Certified Teachers (NBCT) is now extended to SLPs with national certification (CCC) from ASHA.

- Pennsylvania's Pittsburgh Public School District offers salary increases for related service providers processing Medicaid reimbursement paperwork.

Revamping of pay scales is another popular strategy. For example, some districts are paying Master's level SLPs on a doctoral level scale, offering higher entry level pay for SLPs than for classroom teachers, or offering salaries commensurate with those of school psychologists.

Even when a school district cannot afford to offer higher salaries, there are other ways of creating attractive financial packages. For example:

- California offers reduced interest rates or no-money-down mortgages on housing loans for SLPs who teach and reside in high-need districts.
- The Minneapolis School District offers increased contract time per day for paperwork as well as extra days of pay.
- North Carolina's Edgecombe County Public Schools provides SLPs with a materials allowance, professional development allowance, laptops, dues for professional memberships and reimbursement for state licensure fees.



The PIC provides state and local training and implementation support to use the following strategies:

- the use of new social media such as Facebook and Twitter to promote the unique features of a specific community, school or program as well as to post job openings;
- "Blastcasts" advertising specific jobs to related service providers after purchasing their names and e-mail addresses from state-level related service provider associations; and
- YouTube videos to share with high school and college students, along with mid-career changers, about the rewards of working in schools.

Contracted Recruitment Services

States and localities frequently contract with private recruitment services to hire related service providers for specific positions instead of handling recruitment "in house." Contracted recruitment services can be an effective and cost-efficient means of reaching related service providers. For example, Texas' Part C lead agency, the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), offers local Part C lead agencies free subscriptions to Absolutely Healthcare Online and San Antonio's Part C lead agency supplements this with a subscription to <http://sanantonio.jobing.com>.

RETENTION

According to ASHA's website, additional incentive ideas include stipends for high student achievement, serving in schools with long-term vacancies, conducting bilingual assessments, or working in a district's before and after school speech-language programs.

Grow Your Own Programs

Grow Your Own programs can be an effective means of recruiting paraprofessionals or high school students to related services positions. For example, Misericordia University's Career Exploration Summer Camps in Pennsylvania offer high school juniors and seniors multi-day residential opportunities to learn more about careers in occupational therapy and speech language pathology.

Outreach and Media

In addition to traditional outreach methods that include advertisements in professional journals and newsletters, tables at job fairs and presentations at state colleges and universities to promote school-based careers, recent technological innovations offer additional means of recruiting related service providers.

Mentoring and Induction

States and localities are increasingly recognizing the importance of mentoring and induction for novice related service providers and/or veteran related service providers providing school-based services for the first time. For example:

- The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's PT Consultant has created peer groups for school-based PTs throughout the state to support the use of evidence-based practices. The state's PT, OT and SLP consultants have also collaboratively developed an annual new therapists' "boot camp" as well as a "tune up" for veteran related service providers.
- Progressus Therapy, a national company, contracts with districts to provide mentoring services to OTs, PTs and SLPs via its Career Launch program (<http://www.progressustherapy.com/Student-Info/Career-Launch.aspx>).
- In collaboration with the PIC, several early intervention (EI) programs in Texas are piloting a private online community that offers support to Early Intervention specialists, including related service providers. The community, which will launch in the Spring of 2011, will





be facilitated by several expert EI mentors and will enable related service providers in local EI programs to give and receive support via postings on a password-protected website.

Addressing Working Conditions

In order to address the sometimes excessively large caseloads of OTs, PTs, and SLPs, related service providers and related service provider associations are advocating, often successfully, for conversion from a caseload to a workload model. For example:

- Ohio's Cincinnati Public Schools and Oregon's Portland Public Schools now use a 3:1 service model in which SLPs provide direct services to students for three weeks of each month, followed by a fourth week of indirect services, including consultative meetings with teachers and parents, development of treatment materials and completion of paperwork.

Because many preparation programs for related service providers offer limited (if any) training for working in a school-based context, an important factor in addressing working conditions has to do with the level of support provided by the local agency or program for its related service providers. One way locales are addressing this is by developing guides or handbooks for related service providers. For example:

- An interdisciplinary team in Prince George's County, Maryland developed a school-based guide for OTs and PTs.

Another way of addressing working conditions for itinerant related service providers, particularly those serving geographically isolated parts of the country where personnel shortages are felt most acutely, is the use of telepractice. Telepractice relies on telecommunications technology such as videoconferencing to deliver related services from a distance. One of the significant benefits of telepractice is the fact that it helps related service providers utilize their limited time more efficiently i.e., focusing on the provision of services as opposed to commuting. The PIC has been working with Nevada to develop appropriate telepractice guidelines, policies and practices. Nevada will soon pilot its telepractice program in several school districts throughout the state.

Additional ways of improving working conditions for related service providers include:

- providing appropriate workspace;
- developing computerized forms for individualized education programs (IEPs) and other required paperwork,
- providing needed administrative support;
- reducing non-teaching responsibilities;

- using related service provider assistants to supplement the delivery of related services;
- establishing structures to enable networking among school-based related service providers; and
- providing flexible schedules, part time contracts and/or job-sharing.

State-Level Strategies

- The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction is one of only a few states to have created dedicated state-level positions for OT, PT and SLP consultants, all of whom are actively engaged in recruitment and retention efforts, including outreach to students attending preparation programs at institutions of higher education (IHEs) throughout the state and offering a series of related service summits each year, as well as regional meetings and webinars targeting the needs of related service providers working in schools.
- The Ohio Department of Education provided \$10 million in funding for the Ohio Master's Network Initiatives in Education (OMNIE) project (<http://omnie.org/>). Components of the project, designed to improve recruitment and retention of SLPs in schools, include distance learning programs, tuition reimbursement in exchange for a commitment to work in the public schools, signing bonuses, state guidelines to improve working conditions, use of telepractice and telesupervision pilot programs, high school and college recruitment activities and an expanded online recruitment system.
- The South Carolina Department of Education recently implemented Project SLP-RRS: Speech Language Pathologist Recruitment and Retention in Schools (<http://www.asha.org/uploadedFiles/careers/recruitment/schools/ProjectSLPRRS.pdf>). The project includes recruitment of qualified SLPs via scholarships, improved working conditions and financial incentives for working in a school-based setting.
- ASHA worked with the Nevada State Speech-Language-Hearing Association to establish a Coalition on Addressing Personnel Shortages in Special Education and Related Services. The purpose of the Coalition is to initiate state-wide discussion among stakeholders regarding recruitment and retention of qualified special education, related services and early intervention personnel throughout the state.



NATIONAL LEVEL RESOURCES

- The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) website hosts a student recruitment center at <http://www.aota.org/students.aspx> where videos are available and interactive chats can take place.
- ASHA's website provides career information about the profession, as well as information for job seekers and employers at <http://www.asha.org/careers/>. Detailed information on state- and local-level efforts to improve recruitment and retention in schools, including a video clip about how to use the site for recruitment, can be found at <http://www.asha.org/careers/recruitment/schools/>.
- The American Physical Therapy Association's (APTA) website's section on pediatrics has a school-based PT special interest group with resources posted at <http://www.pediatricapta.org/special-interest-groups/school-based-therapy/index.cfm>.
- The National Coalition on Personnel Shortages in Special Education and Related Services' website at <http://www.specialedshortages.org/> provides information on the national organizations that represent related service providers.



Personnel Improvement Center

National Center to Improve Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Personnel for Children with Disabilities

PIC STAFF

Phoebe Gillespie, Ph.D., Director
Bill East, Ed.D., Principal Investigator
Eve Müller, Ph.D., Researcher/Writer
Leila Richey, M.A., Communications Manager
Christine Cashman, M.Ed., Recruitment/Outreach
Coordinator
Donna Reynolds, Project Assistant

STATE SERVICE PROVIDERS

Lisa Churchill, Ph.D.
Fred DeMay, M.Ed.
George Ann Rice, Ed.D.

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This practice brief is part of a series intended to provide examples of how states and localities throughout the nation are employing recruitment and retention strategies to address personnel shortages in the area of special education, early intervention and related services. The series was produced by the Personnel Improvement Center (PIC) and highlights recruitment and retention efforts within states and localities supported by the PIC. There are no copyright restrictions on these practice briefs, but the PIC requests that proper citation be used.

