



AMERICAN  
SPEECH-LANGUAGE-  
HEARING  
ASSOCIATION

## Student Loan Forgiveness

### ACTION REQUESTED

Please co-sponsor H.R.209, *Helping Our Students Communicate Act of 2009*, as introduced by Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC). This legislation targets prospective school-based speech-language pathologists (SLPs) for federal student loan forgiveness if they work in economically disadvantaged (Title I) schools for at least five consecutive years.

### BACKGROUND

Under H.R. 209, speech-language pathologists that have Stafford loans granted after 90 days 1998 would be eligible to receive up to \$17,500 of higher education loan forgiveness.

Quality special education and related services provided to children with disabilities are integral to their success, and no related service is more utilized than speech-language pathology services. Children with speech, language, or hearing disorders account for about 30% of all services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and roughly 75% of all school-based Medicaid claims are for eligible children with these disorders.

The school-age population and the requirement to provide services to students with disabilities will increase the demand for SLP services in the future. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employment of speech-language pathologists is expected to grow 11 percent from 2006 to 2016." School districts' ability to recruit and retain qualified SLPs will be further complicated by attrition through retirements. According to the U.S. Department of Education's *24<sup>th</sup> Annual Report to Congress*, almost half of all school-based speech-language pathologists will be eligible for retirement by 2017. The study concludes that unless the number of newly prepared SLPs increases substantially, a severe shortage will be unavoidable.

As with other educator shortages in schools (e.g., math, science, and special education teachers), vacancies and retention rates are often most severe for speech-language pathologists in lower-income, inner city, and rural areas. H.R.209 would extend help to these school districts.

It is crucial that Congress act now to address the long-term projected shortage of SLPs by making this incentive permanent to recruit and retain professionals to educate our nation's most needy children. Please support and co-sponsor H.R 209.

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## Impact of Speech-Language Pathologists in Schools

- 1) Related services provided to special education students are integral to their success and no related service is more utilized than speech-language pathology. Children with speech, language, or hearing disorders account for about 30% of all services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and roughly 75% of all school-based Medicaid funds provided for eligible children.<sup>1</sup>
- 2) The school-age population is expected to expand over the next decade along with extended services for disabled students. The Department of Education's *24th Annual Report to Congress* indicates that almost half of all school-based speech-language pathologists will be eligible for retirement within approximately 15 years. The study concludes that unless the number of newly prepared SLPs increases substantially, a severe shortage will be unavoidable.<sup>2</sup>
- 3) According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment of speech-language pathologists is expected to grow 11 percent from 2006 to 2016.<sup>3</sup>
- 4) Maintaining a pool of qualified speech-language pathologists will assist in decreasing the instances of over-identification and the disproportionate representation by race and ethnicity of children as having a disability, or as having a particular disability. Almost half of the children with hearing loss in the United States, a quarter of students provided services under IDEA, and 9% are English language learners from racial/ethnic minority populations.<sup>4 5</sup>
- 5) Everyday, an average of 33 babies are born with permanent hearing loss, making hearing loss the number one birth defect in America.<sup>6 7</sup> When deaf children are not identified early and given appropriate early intervention speech and audiology services, additional special education services beyond what would have otherwise been required can cost the local school district an additional half million dollars.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education. *Key Findings. The Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPense)*. 7:2002.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Education. *Ensuring an Adequate Supply of High-Quality, School-Based Speech-Language Pathologists*, (section III). 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. 2002.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Labor. *Occupational employment projections to 2010*. November 2001 Monthly Labor Review. Washington, D.C.; 2001. <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos099.htm> .

<sup>4</sup> Gallaudet Research Institute. *Regional and National Summary Report of Data from the 2002- 2003 Annual Survey of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children and Youth*. Washington, DC: GRI, Gallaudet University. 2003. [http://gri.gallaudet.edu/Demographics/2003\\_National\\_Summary.pdf](http://gri.gallaudet.edu/Demographics/2003_National_Summary.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Education. *Key Findings. The Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPense)*. 7:2002.

<sup>6</sup> National Center on Hearing Assessment and Management. <http://www.infanthearing.org/research/summary/prevalence.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Program. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/ehdi/default.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> Johnson JL, Mauk GW, Takekawa KM, Simon PR, Sia CCJ, Blackwell PM. Implementing a statewide system of services for infants and toddlers with hearing disabilities. *Seminars in Hearing*. 1993;14:105-119.