

A Window of Opportunity



OVER THE YEARS DURING MY WORK WITH SCHOOLS, children and families, windows of opportunity have allowed wonderful expansions of programs for audiology and HI services. In fact, at the end of each school year, my staff and I prepare a “wish list” for the school administrators in case there are any funds available that must be used or lost.

No matter what setting you are in as an audiologist, you may have before you a window of opportunity to enhance services and technology for schools in your local areas. If you are employed as an educational audiologist, in private practice or in a medical/clinical setting that provides pediatric services, exploring the current status of “stimulus funds” could yield positive outcomes for all involved. For those of you in other audiology settings, you could have an opportunity to establish relationships with local school districts for expansion of services.

To explain the term “stimulus funds.” On February 17, 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) was signed into law. This legislation brought an unprecedented \$787 billion of appropriations, with more than \$100 billion in funds dedicated to education. These funds were to be distributed over a two-year period, beginning in July 2009.

So what does this have to do with audiology? There are some targeted areas for spending ARRA funds for projects within the scope of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), including:

- audiology services;
- technology for identification of hearing disabilities (otoacoustic emissions, tympanograms);
- technology for classroom use (FM, sound field).

In the next few months, all of these funds have to be spent. In one of the school

districts for which my practice provides educational audiology services, the school administrator and I collaborated and were able to purchase \$103,000 in new personal FM devices for students. It is not unheard of for school administrators to “hold back” on spending these funds until the last minute. The administrators often are afraid that they will need the funds for some major issue or emergency, so the money sits until the last six months or so. Then that “window of opportunity” opens.

As an audiologist, being prepared for this opportunity means getting to know the

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local school district administrators and educating them on the mandate for audiology services in the schools as well as the technology available to assist students in classrooms. Most importantly, audiologists need to make sure that they are educated and up to speed on available technologies.

These services, as outlined in IDEA parts B and C, are to be provided by a licensed audiologist who is qualified and trained in pediatric audiology and the fitting and management of assistive technology. Any other staff involved with this technology must be directly trained and supervised by a licensed audiologist.

According to IDEA Part B-300.34 (c) (1) and Part C-300.13 (b) (2), audiology services include:


- Identification of children with hearing loss;
- Determination of the range, nature and degree of hearing loss, including referral for medical or other professional attention for the habilitation of hearing;
- Provision of habilitation activities, such

as language habilitation, auditory training, speech reading, (lipreading), hearing evaluation, and speech conservation;

- Creation and administration of programs for prevention of hearing loss;
- Counseling and guidance of pupils, parents, and teachers regarding hearing loss;
- Determination of the child’s need for group and individual amplification, selecting and fitting an appropriate aid, and evaluating the effectiveness of amplification;
- Identification of children with auditory impairments, using at-risk criteria and appropriate audiological screening techniques;
- Determination of the range, nature, and degree of hearing loss and communication functions, by use of audiologic evaluation procedures;
- Referral for medical and other services necessary for the habilitation or rehabilitation of an infant or toddler with a disability who has an auditory impairment;

• Provision of auditory training, aural rehabilitation, speech reading and listening device orientation and training, and other services;

- Provision of services for the prevention of hearing loss; and
- Determination of a child’s need for individual amplification, including selecting, fitting and dispensing of appropriate listening and vibrotactile devices, and evaluating the effectiveness of those devices.

So take the time to research the needs of local school districts, whether you are employed by a school district or not. By being proactive, your efforts may bring about a whole new era in service and technology availability for children in your area. Step through this outstanding window of opportunity! 

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