

## Optimizing SLP and SLPA Services: Key Insights from Empathy Interviews with Special Education Directors of DMSELPA and Charter SELPA

January 2025 - This endeavor was led by Iván Campos



### Overview

The following summary captures key insights from empathy interviews with 15 Local Education Agencies (LEAs) who participated, comprising 9 districts and 6 charter schools, both large and small within Desert Mountain SELPA (DMSELPA) and Desert Mountain Charter SELPA (DMCS). These insights provide a sampling of the current state of Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) and Speech-Language Pathology Assistants (SLPAs) in these LEAs as shared by their respective Special Education Directors. Included are successes, challenges, structural factors, and recommendations for improving the roles and contributions of SLPs and SLPAs (See Figure 1 for a summary).

### Key Successes

- Staffing and Personnel Management (6 mentions): Efforts to recruit, retain, and develop skilled SLP staff have been central to maintaining quality services and meeting increasing demands.
- Professional Development and Support (5 mentions): Continued investment in professional growth through training, conferences, mentorship, and incentives ensures SLPs and SLPAs stay current in their practice.
- Collaboration and Teamwork (4 mentions): Strong collaboration among SLPs, SLPAs, and school teams fosters a cohesive approach to student services, enhancing outcomes.
- Quality of Services and Student Success (4 mentions): Focused efforts on individualized student services and efficient processes have contributed to positive student outcomes.
- Supportive Administrative Leadership (3 mentions): LEA leaders have shown strong support for staffing and resource allocation.

### Key Challenges

- Staffing and Recruitment (7 mentions): Recruiting and retaining qualified SLP staff remains a significant challenge.
- Service Delivery and Workload (7 mentions): High caseloads and the increasing number of referrals create strain, making it difficult to meet student needs and maintain service quality.
- IEPs and Compliance (7 mentions): Ensuring proper IEP implementation and meeting legal compliance requirements remains an ongoing challenge.
- Virtual Services (4 mentions): Issues with teletherapy include a lack of cultural fit to the LEA and the challenge of maintaining effective supervision and service delivery remotely.
- Educational Understanding and Support (4 mentions): Gaps in school staff understanding of speech and language development, especially in early education and the impact of articulation on academics, resulting in high numbers of referrals for evaluation.

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### Gaps and Areas for Improvement

- LEA Evaluation and Improvement of SLP/SLPA Policies (2 mention): There is a need for DMSELPA to provide support to LEAs in assessing current LEA SLP/SLPA policies to ensure they are effective and address emerging challenges in service delivery.
- Clarity in Professional Development (1 mention): Clearer guidelines for what professional development SLPs and SLPAs require per the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC), California Speech-Language Pathology & Audiology & Hearing Aid Dispensers Board (SLPAHADB), and American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA).
- Communication of SELPA Services (1 mention): Better communication around DMSELPA's role in professional development and the resources available to SLPs.

### Conclusion

The insights from these interviews reveal both strengths and areas for improvement within the member LEA SLP/SLPA community of DMSELPA and Charter SELPA. Key recommendations for enhancing the role of SLPs & SLPAs include addressing staffing and compensation challenges, improving workload management, fostering better union collaboration, streamlining virtual service delivery, and clarity in professional development required. By focusing on these priorities, LEAs can better support the SLP/SLPA community, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes and enhanced service delivery.

This report highlights the essential role that SLPs and SLPAs play in the educational landscape, while also identifying significant challenges that impact their ability to deliver high-quality services. Addressing issues such as staffing, compensation, workload management, and professional development, along with a focus on creating a supportive and collaborative environment, will help strengthen the SLP/SLPA workforce. By implementing these recommendations, LEAs can improve the experience for SLPs and SLPAs, leading to better student outcomes and a more effective educational system overall.

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Figure 1 | \* = number of mentions



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