

## pediatric pointers



# Educational Services: Consider School Consultation

**W**hen was the last time you sat in a third-grade classroom and just listened? Today's classrooms are in constant motion. There often is more than one teacher in the room with movement and groups occurring simultaneously throughout the day. On any given day, the teacher is talking, the students are moving (and talking), the HVAC system is running, and lights are humming. Teachers today don't stand in one place, and their constant movement changes the perception of speech for all students.

Now consider the student with an auditory disorder. Whether it is a unilateral hearing loss, bilateral hearing loss requiring hearing aids, conductive/fluctuating hearing loss, or an auditory processing disorder, the impact of an auditory disorder on a student's educational performance is cause for audiologists to consider where our role really ends.

Schools routinely see children who have been diagnosed in audiology clinics and in private practices. Test results most often are described in a brief format designed for a medical professional to read, interpret and intervene. In many cases, the parent is provided with information about the child's auditory disorder and counseled to bring the information to the school. However, too many times this information, even when given to the schools, does not provide the information necessary to help the child in their educational setting.

Audiologists who work in the schools see the impact of auditory disorders in the classrooms on a regular basis. They are asked to interpret and assess the needs of children to determine whether they might benefit from hearing aids, FM systems, accommodations, or modifications. But what happens to the student with an auditory disorder mainstreamed into a school with no audiologic support?

Clinical and pediatric audiologists that routinely evaluate and diagnose children can be a great source of information and guidance to the schools in their communities. Providing reports that are not only concise in their diagnosis description but also in their

correlation of educational impact gives the school the basic information needed for planning academic programs. Audiologic consultation services put the audiologist in direct contact with the school, allowing them to be involved with the student's intervention. Providing in-service presentations on hearing loss and auditory disorders, attending educational planning meetings, performing classroom acoustic assessments, and defining specific parameters for classroom and personal FM systems are just a few of the services that can help schools understand the value of audiologic services.

In this day and age, as schools are being hit by more and more budget cuts, how do we introduce a new service to a school district and get them to see the value in our services and expertise? Funding protocols and intervention services require that schools demonstrate and document need with written rationales for providing students with services outside of the traditional school curriculum. For schools that do not employ or consult with an educational audiologist, this may be an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the benefit of audiologic services.

Providing audiologic consultation services to schools can start with just one student from your practice. School personnel often appreciate a personal phone call to discuss findings and recommendations. Teachers generally want more information that will help them understand and reach the hard of hearing child more effectively. Providing this information and offering to provide in-service education for faculty and administrators can create a relationship that may lead to the audiologist becoming the primary resource for the school's auditory-related needs.

Charging for services will vary depending on the part of the country in which you practice. You will need to examine what your services are worth hourly. Things to consider would include the amount of time you will be spending out of the office for on-site visits, travel time to the schools and the amount of time you spend in preparing your in-service materials.

Audiologic consultation to schools is an area that has been overlooked by many schools and audiologists. With so many auditory-impaired students mainstreamed into the regular schools, we have a perfect opportunity to reach out to schools and explain the professional services audiologists can offer to help with intervention for students. Creating a professional relationship with a school district takes time but can add a mutually beneficial component to any audiology practice. 💰

*Donna M. Goione-Merchant, AuD, CCC-A, FAAA, is an audiologist in private practice in Brick, NJ. She provides diagnostic testing and consults to several school districts, working closely with educational professionals to enhance classroom management of children with auditory disorders.*