

White Paper - Lesson Plans

Though lesson plans fall under the purview of each district contract, NJSHA advocates for planning speech-language therapy prior to each session. Lesson plans are often due within a specified time frame for teachers as well as SLSs, as stipulated by individual district contracts, prior to teaching a classroom lesson or performing therapy. Planning speech-language therapy in advance results in providing more effective sessions as well as promoting more effective alignment with IEP goals and objectives.

Recently, with the advent of the new evaluation system in New Jersey, administrators are being held accountable for the detailed evaluation of their staff, including related service providers. In order to satisfy these requirements, administrators/districts are now holding SLSs accountable for the district's contractual obligation of lesson plans, at times requesting speech-language plans in the format of those for the classroom teachers.

As acknowledged by the NJDOE throughout the formulation of the teacher evaluation system, SLSs, certified through an educational services certificate, provide different types of instruction than teachers, who hold an instructional certificate. Teacher/staff evaluation also makes this recognition between services provided as teaching vs. therapy. In the same vein, lesson plan formats used by SLSs should vary from those used by teachers. Teachers address curricular goals that are stated in their plans as goals for all students and thus, address goals for the entire class. As per regulation in New Jersey's Special Education Code, N.J.A.C. 6A:14, SLSs address IEP goals and objectives, which are individualized and apply to individual students within a group or the class in the case of in-class services. Therapy goals are written to assist students in gaining access to the curriculum rather than teach the curriculum

Although SLSs may use classroom materials within a group or individualized session, they apply strategies to help students succeed in school and regularly adjust materials to meet each student goal. The targeted goals are already stated within individual student's IEP. A therapy session with a group of up to 5 students could possibly mean targeting upwards of 10 goals for that session. Online teacher lesson plan formats, which are designed for whole class instruction, would be burdensome, redundant, and an inefficient use of SLSs' time. To write individual goals in addition to the plan targeting them is unrealistic. The procedure should be simplified so that it is similar to the session notes required by Medicaid, an initiative that results in a tremendous amount of income for districts.

In order to assist districts/administrators/SLSs in meeting contractual obligations of lesson plans along with other mandated responsibilities, including observations, evaluations, diagnostic reports and IEP meetings, NJSHA proposes the use of a lesson plan format that will take into account the fact that since individual goals are already documented in IEPs, the procedures, materials and home practice are the salient information that should be documented in the lesson plan. The purpose of SLSs writing lesson plans is to show that they are planning ahead, but since they have many

more individualized goals to target than a teacher's five classes to log each day, their preparation should be thorough though a bit more telegraphic, and at times on individual sheets. Writing extensive lesson plans on each group in a lesson plan book, would be redundant and would not satisfy Medicaid logging regulations. The approach suggested within this white paper would demonstrate planning/preparation by SLSs in a way that would promote efficient use of time as well as satisfying district policies and would also ensure that lessons are driven by IEP goals.

The need to follow Medicaid requirements, which mandate individual documentation of specific services on specific dates as well as documentation of progress toward goals, also supports the above suggested procedure for SLS lesson plans. If SLSs were required to write group lesson plans in a teacher plan format as well as individual plans for Medicaid, time for other responsibilities would be eradicated completely. In addition, individualized documentation allows for progress monitoring of each student, which is necessary to ensure that the district is providing a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to all classified students.

If an issue relating to lesson plans occurs in a district, SLSs may choose to speak with their administrators, keeping their education association (union) apprised about the situation, and explain mandated regulations concerning IEPs and Medicaid for each child. It can be clarified that although SLSs plan ahead as do teachers, the format of the lesson plan varies. Materials, procedures and homework as well as progress data of each lesson should be documented. Due to privacy regulations and the diversity of objectives on IEPs, SLSs may choose to use individual student log sheets, which are often kept for Medicaid purposes as well as for logging of sessions to document provision of FAPE. SLSs should educate administrators and the union that Medicaid has specific health care requirements for reimbursement including documentation of specific services on each date a student is seen as well notes on progress. Non-compliance with these requirements may constitute Medicaid fraud. Remind the union that SLSs fall under a different certification as related services providers and ask them to take note if psychologists, social workers or guidance counselors, who fall under the same certification, are being directed to write lesson plans, using teacher formats, when planning for the provision of related services (e.g., counseling). It is important to involve the union in this discussion, because it is the bargaining unit that has agreed upon the timelines and format for lesson plans. Educating the union and administrators about the nature of the services SLSs provide should be ongoing.

To our knowledge, there is no mandate by the state at this time on lesson plans. NJSHA encourages members to alert the School Affairs Committee of any new information regarding lesson plans.

Further information on Medicaid requirements can be found at www.njsha.org under SAC Resources, Review of New Jersey's Medicaid School-Based Health Claims.