

# FINAL BILL REPORT

## ESSB 5601

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Synopsis as Enacted

**Brief Description:** Regulating speech-language pathology assistants.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care (originally sponsored by Senator Franklin).

**Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care**  
**House Committee on Health Care & Wellness**  
**House Committee on Health & Human Services Appropriations**

**Background:** Speech-language pathologists (SLP) study, diagnose and treat disorders of speech, language, and swallowing. These disorders can be congenital, the result of traumatic brain injury, or stroke. A speech language pathology assistant can be used to support the SLP's work in group settings. SLPs are health care providers and are increasing in demand in school settings. SLPs are currently licensed in Washington State. Minimum requirements for licensure include a master's degree or doctorate from a board-approved institution, supervised clinical experience and post-graduate professional work experience.

A SLP license is not required for the practice of SLP in school settings. However, they must be certified as Educational Staff Associates by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. SLP assistants are not currently regulated under state law. SLP assistants are used extensively in schools as paraeducators, but are not currently supervised by SLPs.

In 2007 House bill 2372 was referred to the Department Health (DOH) for a sunrise review of a proposal to license speech language pathologist assistants. This sunrise review is not yet completed but is available in draft form. Although the sunrise proposal sought licensure for SLP assistants, DOH concluded that certification could offer an alternative credentialing standard that meets the sunrise criteria. By providing for certification of SLP assistants, DOH can authorize those who meet the qualifications to use "certified" in their title. It would not be unlawful to practice without certification. Demand in schools for SLP is significant and increasing. Use of SLP assistants would expand the available services.

**Summary:** The designation of certified SLP assistant can only be used by a certified SLP assistant. Minimum qualifications include an associate degree or a bachelor degree or certificate of proficiency from a speech-language pathology assistant program approved by the Board of Hearing and Speech (BHS). As an alternative, within one year of this act's

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enactment, requirements for certification as an SLP assistant may be met by submitting a competency checklist to BHS and by being employed under the supervision of an SLP for a minimum of 600 hours within the last three years.

The Secretary of DOH has authority to discipline SLP assistants. An SLP assistant may only perform tasks delegated by an SLP and must follow the individualized education program and treatment plan.

BHS is given authority to develop rules which outline tasks permitted under the direct and indirect supervision of an SLP. SLP assistants are not permitted to diagnose, evaluate, or provide clinical interpretation.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction is required to report to DOH (1) complaints and disciplinary actions taken against certified educational staff associates providing SLP services in schools; and (2) complaints received against certified SLP assistants.

**Votes on Final Passage:**

Senate	34	14	
House	64	32	(House amended)
Senate	34	14	(Senate concurred)

**Effective:** July 26, 2009