



Ohio Adds \$5 Million to Address Shortages

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by Nada Allender

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) has awarded an additional \$5 million to the Ohio Master's Network Initiatives in Education-Speech-Language Pathology (OMNIE). The grant extends for two years OMNIE's recruitment and retention activities, which are designed to increase the number of school-based clinicians in the state. The new funding brings the four-year total awarded to this project to \$10 million.

"The Ohio Department of Education is committed to the OMNIE project, which has had success in recruitment and retention efforts," said Lou Staffilino, ODE associate superintendent, who recently received recognition from state professional associations for his work on the project. "This is an example of professionals collaborating to benefit Ohio students."

The recent grant extension will provide \$5 million through 2010 to:

- **Add cohorts of students in the collaborative distance-learning graduate program in speech-language pathology.** Seven universities deliver coursework for the three-year, part-time program, which is offered to Ohio residents. Thirty students will be matriculated each year through the University of Akron and University of Cincinnati, which coordinate student advising and monitor academic and clinical skills development. Graduates receive \$10,000 in tuition reimbursement and commit to two years of school-based employment.
- **Increase the number of universities participating in a new intern graduate program.** In this program, highly trained graduate students deliver speech-language services during a two-year school-based internship. Five universities have added 8–10 graduate slots each for this program, and other universities are planning to participate in the program. OMNIE provides \$12,000 to support students during their first year of study, which requires full-time, accelerated on-campus coursework and more than 100 hours in a child-based practicum. At most of the participating universities, this stipend evolves into a fellowship that provides additional first-year tuition waivers. During their second and third years, students participate in full-time school-based internships and receive \$25,000 per year with medical and retirement benefits. Distance education coursework and local practicum placements are coordinated during the internship and summer sessions to allow interns to complete

their educational and clinical requirements. Student interns provide services defined by a limited two-year license issued by the Ohio Board of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology. After completing the graduate program, the fully licensed clinician commits to an additional two years to the district, with the starting salary determined at the master's level with two years of experience and two years' contribution into the state retirement system.

- **Increase Web-based undergraduate courses.** Post-baccalaureate coursework required or recommended by Ohio universities for entry into graduate speech-language pathology programs is made available through distance learning. Student registrations have dramatically increased, and programs have responded by increasing the number and frequency of course offerings.
- **Provide sign-on bonuses.** OMNIE offers \$12,000 sign-on bonuses to SLPs who commit to three years of employment in hard-to-staff districts. The clinician receives \$3,000 in each of the first and second years of service and \$6,000 for the third year of service.
- **Offer financial incentives to graduating students who accept school-based employment.** Any 2007–2008 speech-language pathology graduate from an Ohio program who accepts employment for the 2008–2009 academic year in an Ohio school district may receive \$2,000 in tuition reimbursement, in addition to sign-on bonuses offered by many districts.
- **Expand telepractice and telesupervision pilot programs.** With Kent State University, Ohio has initiated a telepractice pilot program using interactive videoconferencing to deliver services to students in rural areas (see article in an upcoming issue). Universities participating in the intern program plan to develop telesupervision pilot programs to supplement on-site practicum supervision.
- **Continue high school and college recruitment activities.** OMNIE's "Project Inspire" targets high school and college students statewide. Financial incentives are offered to school-based SLPs to promote careers in communication disorders through mentoring, presentations, distribution of promotional materials, and discussions of educational opportunities.
- **Improve working conditions for school-based clinicians.** Several Ohio SLPs are developing "Guidelines for Ohio's SLPs," designed to improve job retention by providing support and current resources to inform best practice and align with policy and procedures and ODE Academic Content Standards. Guidelines will include information on topics such as English-language learners, autism, and response to intervention.
- **Expand Web site.** OMNIE maintains a database, updated monthly, of Ohio's current school-based employment opportunities.

Successful Strategies

The goal of OMNIE's most recent expansion of short- and long-term initiatives is to increase the availability of new highly qualified clinicians to 80–100 each year. After just two years of funded work, the strategies are making a difference:

- Thirty-two interns in speech-language pathology have been placed in school districts for the 2008–2009 academic year. Most will be in regions of the state that—despite

the availability of sign-on bonuses—have had open positions.

- Twenty-one new Ohio graduates accepted school positions last year and received \$1,000 each in tuition reimbursement. The reimbursement incentive has increased to \$2,000 for 2007–2008 graduates.
- Significant sign-on bonuses have attracted numerous SLPs from the private sector as well as several retirees.
- Fifty-four distance-learning students will be available for school-based employment in 2009 or 2010, with 30 new students admitted annually.



For more information about the OMNIE grant, visit www.asha.org (search for "OMNIE"); contact **Nada Allender**, OMNIE project coordinator, at nada@ameritech.net; or visit [OMNIE's Web site](#).

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