

## **Request to the Edwin H. Eddy Foundation**

The Special Services Department of the Duluth Public Schools, on behalf of the district's nineteen speech/language pathologists, is submitting this application for consideration to the Edwin H. Eddy Foundation. This grant request is for \$19,266.19 to be used to purchase much needed educational therapy materials, update tests, supplies, and updated technology for children in this school district who have been identified as having very significant communication disorders. These children range in age from birth to age 21.

## **Communication Disorder Services in the Duluth Public Schools**

School districts in the state of Minnesota are mandated by law to provide speech and language therapy services to children who fall in the most severe range of communication disorders. For the most part, to qualify for services a student must score on standardized measures in the lowest 3% of the population. To remediate their deficits in communication, a speech/language pathologist faces extreme challenges. These challenges are in the form of numbers of children on their caseloads, the number of places assigned to provide therapy, the variety of age groups on a caseload, and the variety of types of communication disorders. When materials, tests, supplies, and technology are sparse, the job they face becomes even more demanding.

Currently there are 16 full time equivalent speech/language pathologist positions in the Duluth Public Schools. Nineteen people share these positions resulting in some positions being only part time. Services are provided to 615 students by 19 speech/language pathologists. Many of the staff travel to a variety of schools, community facilities, and homes to meet the needs of the students on their caseloads. Most speech/language pathologists provide services to varying age groups in a variety of settings. This means materials need to be carried from setting to setting causing a great deal of wear and tear.

Due to funding decreases for special education at the state and federal levels, most school districts are strapped for the funding they so desperately need. This is definitely the case for the special services department here in Duluth, Minnesota. Financial supports continue to decrease as special educators have seen dramatic increases in the intensity of need for many of their students. For example, the incidence of autism spectrum disorders has increased to a current level of one in every 150 children; some actually estimate that number is closer to one in 139 children.

This year the total allocated budget for the 19 speech/language pathologist staff was less than \$2000 (approximately \$150 per therapist). This amount only partially covered the costs of needed materials, protocols, limited supplies, and technology needed for the year. In fact, this amount falls well below what is needed to successfully treat children with a variety of severe communication disorders. Most of our newest tests and materials have come from previous Eddy Foundation grants.

## **Your Help Is Requested**

Speech/language pathologists work diligently to meet specific goals and objectives for each child on their caseload. As a group of therapist they are creative and innovative but with caseloads averaging between 40-45 students and a restricted budget, it is difficult to

provide quality services with outdated materials, tests, supplies, and technology. Your help is requested. With updated materials, tests, supplies, and technology more can be accomplished with students. Your help will also allow for impacting and educating other school staff and parents.

Speech/language pathologists need to teach children in novel and interesting ways so that the brain can learn language using different pathways. The use of toys, books, objects, experiences, and activities allow the brain to make new or different connections resulting in children making sense out of their world through language.

### **Request #1- Boardmaker Program - \$ 4,997.00**

This computer generated picture program allows therapists to produce many teaching displays, games, and visual supports. This program is the gateway to many add-on programs that can be purchased to take the basics of this program to the next step in teaching. New versions have just been made available from the Mayer-Johnson/Dynavox company. Version 6.0 is compatible with all new computer operating systems. It is our hope that each therapist would be able to acquire this new version of Boardmaker.

### **Request #2-Updated Materials, Tests, and Supplies - \$9,500**

Every speech/language pathologist needs to replenish items to update her materials, tests, and supplies because each has specific needs that are dictated by the population of clientele she serves. By giving each therapist \$500 to add to her teaching tools, they can provide customized services to their varied caseload. Standardized tests are being constantly updated and they are expensive. To keep up with professional standards, new tests are a necessity.

### **Request #3-Technology - \$4,769.19**

**Video Flip Cameras:** Research continues to show the value of using new technology in the teaching process with children who display communication disorders. For example, the use of video modeling with the autism population has proven to be an extraordinary teaching tool. Short video clips can be used to model correct social behaviors, prepare them for what will be happening in the near future, and to demonstrate rules associated to new games or social events. A digital camera is able to produce only short clips but is not sufficient when longer social interaction segments are needed. Video cameras will help with social stories, re-telling an experience, or preparing a child for a new social interaction.

**Digital Voice Recorders:** Communication samples are at the heart of assessment and therapy of all speech and language disorders. Traditionally, these samples are taken with tape recorders. Tape recordings can distort the student's voice and articulation and therefore make it difficult for therapists and students to hear the true production of speech. Digital voice recording technology has improved the quality of recording and playback so that the original productions of speech and language are preserved. Research is clear that

students must develop awareness of their speech and language disorders in order for them to identify and solve communication break-downs. Moreover, this technology enhances the students' understanding of correct and incorrect speech and language productions so that they can learn to monitor and self-correct their speech and language errors.

**USB Memory:** Digital images and documents require high storage capacities. Our district provided computer systems do not have the capacity to store large amounts of digital images and documents for long-term use. Therefore, external memory is necessary to hold documents generated from video and digital recording devices. We are not able to afford this basic necessity due to our limited resources.

### **Timeline for the Request**

Upon receiving this award, ordering of supplies, materials, tests, supplies, and technology, this proposal can be accomplished within six months.

Thank you for considering this request. The Eddy Foundation's ongoing support for our department and the children we serve has been a great asset.