

Huddle up



TELETHERAPY

Making Therapy Services More
Effective and Accessible

Traditional therapy delivery models are not meeting the growing demands of our students. There is a shortage of certified therapists, an increasing need for specialized services, increased risk of litigation and logistical barriers hindering quality and effective therapy delivery.

An innovative redesign of therapy delivery solves the major problems of the traditional model; change is necessary to offer the highest quality service available.

Huddle Up utilizes an online video conferencing platform to provide face-to-face therapy services without location as a factor. Students are matched with the appropriately specialized therapist, parents and special education teams are afforded flexible meeting times, and therapy services continue consistently based on student progress and growth.



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Introduction: Why Your School Needs Huddle Up

- 67% of speech-language pathologists report a **shortage in human resources**. Teletherapy provides a **cost-effective alternative** to traditional, on-site speech and language therapy in schools.
- Teletherapy works: outcomes and fidelity in assessment findings parallel services performed on-site, with several studies documenting the successes of telepractice as an effective service delivery model.
- Under the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act, **schools are mandated to provide speech and language therapy** for students with communication disorders in order to ensure their educational success.
- The number of students requiring speech and language services in schools is rapidly rising and is disproportionate to the number of certified professionals in the field.

¹Waite et al., 2006; Waite et al., 2010; Crutchley et al., 2010; Grogan-Johnson et al., 2010; Scheideman-Miller et al., 2002; McCullough, 2001; Grogan-Johnson et. al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2008

²United States Department Of Education, 2017



Current Issues:

Therapist Shortage and Options to Fill Vacancies

47% of school-based speech-language pathologists report an insufficient supply of certified therapists at their school, with this fluctuating up to a high of **67%** shortage reported in Pacific states.

Many districts incur **time, effort, and financial expenditures** in order to recruit certified professionals. Some of the current options to fill therapists in the traditional model are outlined below:

- Offer yearly stipends or signing bonuses in addition to a base salary (costly)
- Seek additional federal funding through legislative action (time intensive)
- Contract with a local hospital or contract therapy company (costly and ineffective: The skillsets of these contractors may be more tailored to service provision in medical settings as opposed to school-based therapy focus involving parents, teachers, and a multidisciplinary team).

³American Speech-Language Hearing Association (2012)

⁴ *The National Coalition on Personnel Shortages in Special Education and Related Services*



The Need for Specialized Services

While filling vacancies in underserved populations is a pressing issue, there is also a definite lack of therapists certified to deliver specialized services.

For example:

Multilingual Therapy

- 1 in 5 people in the United States speak a language other than English at home.

Hearing Impaired Student Services

- Over 70,000 students in the U.S. receive services related to hearing impairment.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Speech Therapy Services

- 1 in 68 children are diagnosed with ASD⁶

Specialized therapy services are a growing need in the industry, yet the traditional model fails to contribute to the effective placement of appropriately certified therapists.

This limitation is detrimental to the delivery of successful therapy services.

⁵Niskar et al., 1998

⁶Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2017)



Risk of Litigation

Due process circumstances can be prompted by a variety of scenarios including, but not limited to:

- A lack of parent understanding and transparency within multidisciplinary recommendations and services
- Non-compliance with special education laws
- A lack of adequate therapy services

School districts across the United States spend over **\$90 million** annually in conflict resolution

Logistical Barriers

The following factors are necessary components of effective therapy in schools:

- Need-based, individualized services
- Shorter, more frequent sessions
- Appropriate student grouping when necessary
- Least restrictive environment (limited time away from non-disabled peers)

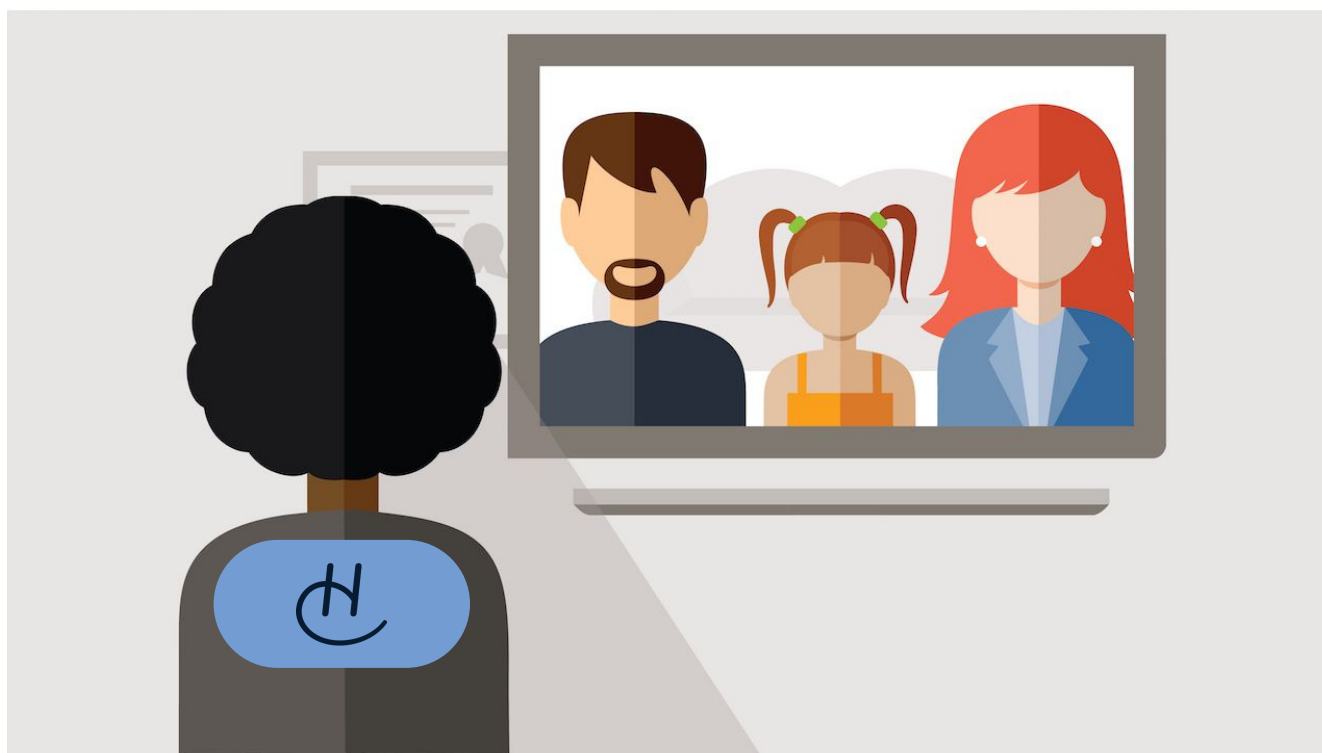
These needs are not always met within the traditional model due to time constraints, lack of accessibility, and therapist to student ratios. Instead of scheduling based on what is best for the student, therapists are constrained in providing services based on logistics and timing, thereby limiting the effectiveness of services.



The Teletherapy Solution:

Teletherapy service delivery model allows for:

- Face-to-face online services
- Ethical practice within established, school-based parameters
- The removal of barriers that schools face in accessing adequately certified professionals.



Benefits for Special Education Teams

Teletherapy benefits for schools and special education teams include:

- Individualized assessment and support of school needs
- Therapist placement based on need rather than convenience
- Empowerment of special education administrators, lead staff, and on-site employees
- Engagement with a dynamic group of certified professionals
- Certified and appropriately assigned assistance delivering exceptional speech and language therapy services to students

In a study completed by Sulkowski (2015), school staff supported through teletherapy supervision performed comparably to those who had on-site supervision.

Telepractice is not intended to replace traditional therapy models but rather to allow schools unrestricted access to therapists with diverse expertise to improve student progress, no matter the location.

Benefits for Students

- Individualized therapy services based on need
- Increased access to specialized services
- Priority of the least restrictive environment
- More time in general education classes
- Effective partnerships and support between on-site SLPs, teachers, and teletherapists to ensure high quality, effective services
- Flexibility in location and time of services
- Engagement based on effective activities and highly qualified therapists
- The most inclusive intervention possible
- Service delivery outside of a traditional therapy room if and when it is deemed to be in the best interest of the student
- Location accommodation based on students' individualized needs.
- Seamless classroom observations
- Proficiency with school-based delivery methods



Decreasing The Risk of Litigation

Teletherapists with a working knowledge of and focus on technology throughout the workday can easily implement standards of practice in accordance with laws and regulations that include added communication with stakeholders and multidisciplinary teams as well as provide exemplary documentation, thereby, limiting the potential for litigation.

Parents can also engage in the therapy sessions or Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings from afar, providing unlimited opportunities for productivity and compliance. With successful introductions of teletherapy services, community transparency, and efficiency in communication with parents, fear surrounding the implementation of new programs can be minimized.



The Added Benefits of Technology

- Students, such as those with autism spectrum disorders, progressed in the area of communication similarly whether the service was provided on-site or through teletherapy (Boisvert et al., 2012).
- Individualized services
- Added engagement through the technology platform and extensive educator support is achieved in the face-to-face online service delivery model.
- Students with extensive need for intense specialized instruction throughout the school day are given the opportunity to progress toward their goals with consistent and frequent individualized instruction from the skilled therapist.
- The online and personal approach, coupled with educator support, allows the teletherapist added flexibility to structure interventions according to students' needs. Synchronous teletherapy: involves live videoconferencing with a credentialed therapist. It models the traditional approach through face-to-face interactions between student and teletherapist.
- Asynchronous services: images or data are captured and transmitted (i.e., stored and forwarded) for viewing or interpretation by a professional⁷.

⁷ASHA, 2017



Conclusion

Telepractice has already started to take hold in the industry, as evidenced by national governing bodies' positioning statements and school board association endorsement of this model. It is a proven model yielding similar results to in-person service delivery (Grogan-Johnson et al., 2010). Students of all ages and abilities can be served through remote teletherapy and this model provides schools with viable solutions for filling vacancies with qualified, experienced professionals. While innovation can provide access to a wide variety of certified therapists and improve access barriers to service provision in schools, it is important to ensure the safety and efficacy in selecting new service delivery models. The future of teletherapy affords schools access to an ecosystem of certified speech-language pathologists. Furthermore, it supplements and supports on-site therapists to ensure that the highest quality of services are being offered with no view of teletherapy as a stopgap option but rather a positive, valuable experience for all.

As the trusted voice of the community, school administrators and school boards are now provided the opportunity to become innovators in their own right by choosing to use face-to-face online therapy services on campuses across the country. These stakeholders have been referred to as "educational guardians of the community" (Peshkin,1978); with that responsibility, they must strive to be on the right side of change for students and parents alike. While students benefit implicitly from the teletherapy model, parents appreciate the transparency in service delivery provided through improved communication opportunities with teletherapists. The guarantee of a team of highly notable professionals and innovators in the field can eliminate the typical pressures of recruitment and special education compliance. Entire towns can and should rally behind innovation, helping to provide expertise and services for students with disabilities because every child should have the opportunity to improve and achieve their goals.

