



ASHA
American
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association

January 17, 2024

The Honorable Laurie Sanborn, Chair
The Honorable John Janigian, Vice Chair
Ways and Means Committee
New Hampshire General Court
107 North Main Street
Concord, NH 03301

RE: HB 1533

Dear Representatives Sanborn and Janigian:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to express opposition to HB 1553, which would create a pilot program for “spelling to communicate,” an unproven method of service for children with autism or apraxia.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 228,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology assistants; and students. Over 1,000 ASHA members reside in New Hampshire.¹

We oppose HB 1553 and the establishment of a “spelling to communicate” pilot program. ASHA has issued the following position statement on Rapid Prompting Method, also known as “spelling to communicate.”

It is the position of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) that use of the Rapid Prompting Method (RPM) is not recommended because of prompt dependency and the lack of scientific validity. Furthermore, information obtained through the use of RPM should not be assumed to be the communication of the person with a disability.²

RPM is described as a teaching method that leads to communication for autistic children. When using RPM, an aide holds a letter board (typically in the air) and provides physical and/or verbal prompts (e.g., pointing, moving the letter board, giving verbal reprimands) designed presumably to get a child to spell out words or messages on the letter board. RPM requires an aide to physically hold the child’s alphabet board at all times.

Proponents claim that this technique helps autistic children and others who have limited verbal abilities to “spell to communicate.” They also claim that the technique can uncover previously unknown reading and writing abilities. Although this claim may sound innocuous, it’s far from it. RPM effectively strips people of their human right to independent communication because the technique relies on an aide for prompting. This reality raises a host of questions, concerns, and possible dangers.

ASHA-certified and licensed speech-language pathologists are autonomous professionals who have the education and expertise to evaluate the needs of their students to support communication. In accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of

2004, services should be based on the individual needs of each student and not determined in advance of an evaluation.³ With RPM, children miss out on critical services tailored to their needs; thereby, jeopardizing their development, education, and autonomy.⁴

We urge you to oppose this legislation and invest in appropriate, evidence-based augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems and services for children with communication disorders.⁵ If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Susan Adams, ASHA's director of state legislative and regulatory affairs, at sadams@asha.org.

Sincerely,



Tena L. McNamara, AuD, CCC-A/SLP
2024 ASHA President

¹ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2023). *New Hampshire* [Quick Facts]. <https://www.asha.org/siteassets/advocacy/state-fliers/new-hampshire-state-flyer.pdf>.

² American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2018). *Rapid prompting method*. [Position Statement]. <https://www.asha.org/policy/ps2018-00351/>.

³ Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq. <http://idea.ed.gov/>.

⁴ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). *ASHA Warns Against Rapid Prompting Method or Spelling to Communicate*. <https://www.asha.org/slp/asha-warns-against-rapid-prompting-method-or-spelling-to-communicate/>.

⁵ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). *Augmentative and Alternative Communication (Practice Portal)*. <https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/professional-issues/augmentative-and-alternative-communication/>.