

SLP Happy Hour Podcast Episode 161 School Work Setting

Sarah: Welcome to the SLP Happy Hour podcast. I'm Sarah, your podcast host. Today's topic is working within the school system. What are the pros and the cons? I have two SLPs with me today, Rachel and Megan, who are going to start by introducing themselves and telling us a little bit about their jobs. Let's start with Rachel.

Rachel: Hi everyone. My name is Rachel Archambault. I'm a speech language pathologist in Broward County, which is in South Florida. I've been a speech pathologist for eight years now. I think this is my eighth year in the school system. I went right into schools as soon as I graduated. Um, some of you might know me on Instagram as PTSD.SLP, and that's a little bit about myself.

Megan: Um, and I'm Megan Stewart. I am a speech language pathologist in the North Florida area, so I work at a center school that serves ages three years old through eighth grade. We also serve students that have related disabilities. I am also on Instagram as sensible literacy, and I primarily work with the pre-k age group, but a couple of the other ages at our school as well.

Sarah: Go ahead and tell me more about what your current position is like and what you do daily and weekly.

Megan: So my current position is, uh, standard SLP school position. But with the advent of our population that we serve, uh, we do a lot of AAC, AT, things like that, because primarily our students are nonverbal or limited verbal. We have a lot of AAC use that we have to X and evaluate for. So recently my work has been a lot of AAC evaluations for the pre-k population we work with. I'm a part of the leadership team so I get to help set up things for that.

Rachel: I am primarily a school based SLP. This is my 8th year in the school system. I spent the first 6 years working at a high school, I think that's the only age group I really want to be working with. In Oct 2021 I became an SLP program specialist, within my district there are 7 of us. My district is one of the largest in the country. My position is a lot of driving. I go to all the high schools in the county. There's, I think, 45 schools that I support. So my support looks like me supporting the speech pathologist at those schools, which could be anywhere from 0 to 5 SLPs. They might come to me with a question of, hey, Rachel, I just got a kid with apraxia. I'm not up to date on that information. How do I work with this student? Or they need another eye on a student. So I'll come in and observe and give my thoughts on how to best support that student and that SLP. And sometimes it also takes like a supervisory position, even though it's a lateral position to the basic SLP school-based position. But today I was in a mediation with an assistant principal and a speech pathologist that are having just some issues working together. So that's where kind of that supervisory role comes in. And that counseling mode comes in. And I really, really enjoy the collaboration with adults and working in the school system. For a long time, I was working with the mini adults, the high school students, and I love that. But I wasn't able to collaborate with the adults that much, and I love that part of this new position.

Megan: A lot of the tasks have been doing lately centered around AAC and evaluation and implementation. Um, the majority of our students are nonverbal or minimally verbal. And so we are implementing and introducing and evaluating for AAC. I also do push-in sessions to all of our classrooms that I'm assigned to, whether that be in the classroom or on the playground or what have you, just doing the typical therapy session. And then I'm also a part of the leadership team at our school so helping to set up events to help our students in the community and bring the community into our school.

Sarah: What are some pros and cons of your current positions? Because I think that a lot of people listening to this episode are going to be curious about working within the schools, and you both have very specific and specialized jobs within the school system.

Megan: Pros are definitely the schedule as far as the schools get and having time built into the school year with those breaks and that type of opportunity. I also really pro if being able to collaborate with all the different types of professionals and really build that culture and awareness of what we need to do to help support a con is definitely the fact that being in a public school we are never, quote unquote, full, and we are constantly having new students come, which is great because we love them. But, we don't have a caseload cap, which is really hard, especially with myself working in the pre-school. It makes it difficult to be able to provide the type of therapy that I would like to give them. So that is a that is the biggest con for me. It balances out, though, with the love of working with the preschoolers, of having those breaks, then that ability to collaborate. But right now I would say that is the biggest con for me.

Sarah: And here where I live in Oregon as well, it's just so many unfilled positions right now and such high caseloads at the moment. And what I'm seeing is a big disconnect between the district office and the SLPs. So people in the district office are not being very flexible about SLPs who need support or who want to work full time. They're thinking, okay, it's fine. We'll just hire someone new straight out of grad school. And the challenge of that is that they're not going to be able to do that forever. We're getting definitely to an SLP shortage in the schools, where they should be treating their SLPs a lot better than they are and being more flexible than they are, but they're still thinking about, you know, 10-15 years ago where there were plenty of SLPs to fill positions. So that's what I'm noticing. And my guess is that ten years from now, a lot of school positions will be filled with contractors who are charging a higher rate, which is unfortunate for the districts.

Rachel: Part of what I love about my current role is the administrative part of it that we did all of the placing of school board and contract SLPs last year, we were without the position above me, so basically we had two weeks to put everyone in those positions. It was really, really tough. This year we're in a bit of a better position and we had major vacancies like we had 11 schools without any SLP at that at that school. So that was thousands of kids not receiving services. We are experiencing right now, it's just over 50% that contract employees are in the position. And one of the things that I'm very proud of, of me being in this role for less than three years, is at the end of last school year, we did advocate for a raise for SLPs. One of the supplements that SLPs receive is a \$935 supplement that has been in place since 1988, and that money was still

being used as the supplement. So we got it raised by a few thousand dollars, which was helpful. We also got a different supplement raise, but we are seeing contract companies that are able to pay more. They're also providing benefits. So we're seeing people that are saying, what's the point of being a district employee when we're not held to the same standards? The contract people are able to just check out. They don't have to go to the meetings. They have all these benefits that many people are saying, what's the point of being district SLP? So I'm seeing a lot of the pros and cons at a higher level. Just as Megan said, the caseloads are extremely high. My first year as a CF in a high school, I was given 111 students. And I thought that was just doable. So when I get new CFs that come in and I'm there to support them on their first day, I'm real with them. I'm saying this is a very heavy caseload, or you have 80 students on your caseload. That still is a high caseload. Not even comparing that, I had 111 on mine when I was a CF. Like, it's just a high caseload to begin with. So I'm very frustrated with a lot of aspects of the school system, but I also love helping the students and seeing the SLPs that get something out of the support that I can give to them, whether that's my trauma informed care aspect or just me as a speech pathologist working with high school students, I'm very good at that, and I love sharing what I know with other high school SLPs.

Sarah: So within the schools, there's always more work to do than is reasonable, and we've already touched on that quite a bit. So how do you handle this logistically? Because when I was a school SLPs, at first I thought overworking was the answer. Overworking just gave me more work to do. So I learned that doing less, having early honest conversations with people, stating my needs, having boundaries was something that I had to do a lot in the schools. I did not do it skillfully because I was a pretty new and young clinician at the time. But let's start with you, Rachel. Within your school job, what do you do when there's too much work to do so that you aren't carrying that guilt of, oh my gosh, I'm not doing it all when doing it all was impossible because there's always too much work to do.

Rachel: Thankfully, I've gotten really good at holding boundaries, especially work boundaries. I'm very good at telling people, you know, that deadline is not really doable within the constraints that you're giving me. I'd be happy to discuss adding another week on to that. Or if an administrator comes to me and says, you know, you need to make up all these services within the next two weeks and say that is not logistically feasible within the schedule, or you have me scheduled for ten IEP meetings on one day. I can't see students during that time and those become makeup services, you know? So I'm very good about advocating for myself. And that didn't come easily as a recovering people pleaser. And also my first couple years in the school system. And I see it with the newbies as well, that they don't feel comfortable advocating for themselves or they don't know what is right and what is wrong. Getting more confidence in the school system allowed me to advocate for myself better. And then one of the things that I could think of with my school schedule when I first started was I didn't have lunch breaks, that I was like, I can't possibly, you know, I have to use that time to see students who fit into my schedule. Now, the first thing that goes into my schedule at the beginning of the year is lunch time, and my contracted planning times that I get every day. Those are the first things, and then I build my schedule around that. If people if an administrator comes to me and says, you know, you're not seeing however many students who say, oh, we need another position, I will always advocate

for an appropriate caseload. And this is why we need whether it's a one more day someone comes in or a part time position, we need to advocate for that better.

Sarah: I love that and I love those terms. Like that's not logistically feasible. I also liked using terms like I'm unable to do that due to other demands on my time. If you need a reprioritization of my time, we can schedule a meeting. Nobody wanted to meet with me, I'll tell you that, because they're also too busy. They're just trying to like offload work, offload work, offload work. The big thing that I had to do in the schools was to realize and acknowledge that the paperwork was the most important part, because there are deadlines on how many days we have to do an assessment, how many days, you know, there are triennial revaluations that we have to do. There are initials, there are yearly IEPs. So that really does come first. And that was a hard pill to swallow. But once I accepted that essentially my bosses want me to cancel groups and do this paperwork because the paperwork is the most important thing. That took some pressure off me, but it was still really hard. Megan, as your caseload is growing, how do you advocate for yourself and avoid that overwork, boom and bust cycle of doing too much work and then being exhausted? And then also, do you how do you deal with those feelings of guilt that come when you can't serve kids like you'd like to, because logistically, your caseload is too big and you just can't?

Megan: I've been over here, just nodding the entire time that the both of you aren't saying nothing. I think that Rachel hit it right on the head was saying, you know, initially I wasn't good out of advocating for myself. I thought, you know, I've got to do this. I got to do this because this is my job and these are the kids I'm supposed to serve. But as I became a more experienced SLP and had more time in the schools, I've been able to set those priorities and set those boundaries around my work. And like you were saying, Sarah, unfortunately paperwork does come first sometimes and you have to say "I can't come to groups today because I have 4 IEPs to write." The way I have helped myself with that is it's coming to terms with that myself and realizing that these are a legal documents I have to write that have timelines. If I have a group scheduled in their classroom, but I have IEPs to write, I'll go to that teacher and let them know that there is no group due to paperwork demands, so they don't think I'm just forgetting or not showing up. And so they don't think I'm in my speech room eating bonbons, which we all know is farther from the truth. So that has been my biggest thing, is to think about what I'm doing and keeping it very evident that if I'm not able to provide services because I'm providing documentation or writing a AAC reports, or doing things that have to be done for the student, that I'm just very clear with that, but that also being able to give myself a break sometimes from the paperwork and just say, that's been too much for me, I need to go see kids to kind of make me happy, or I need to go take a walk, or I need to do something else for myself to give myself a little bit of a break.

Sarah: So let's shift from the logistical to the self-care and psychological. How do you deal with the guilt that could come from this? Because when we are in grad school, we are very much taught this like one hour a week, individual sessions model. We are very much taught this like linear upward pattern of growth. And kids are all over the place, in schools were often doing groups. Kids are often gone. We often have to cancel groups for meetings and paperwork time.

So how do you deal with those feelings of guilt that might arise where I'm not doing enough, when really it's not a personal problem? It's a systemwide problem, right? There's not enough FTE. There aren't enough SLPs to do the kind of work that is expected for SLPs. What do you tell yourself when you feel that guilt and how do you deal with it?

Megan: "I can't do it all, so don't make it look like I can." Because if I can make it look like I can do it all, kind of like what Rachel was saying before then in the higher ups, so that the staff are not going to be that one person cannot see for instance, like Rachel said, over 100 kids and do the documentation and do the meeting. So I do what I can. I prioritize, what needs to be done then I recently have gotten really good with leaving work at work, even by leaving my computer there. Even if I bring my computer, it usually just goes for a ride in my car and stays in my bag the entire weekend. And I don't open that up, but that again. So again, just realizing that I am one person and I could only do what one person can do what one person can do.

Rachel: I thought what Megan said, it resonated with me a lot. I also like to remind myself and others that people on my team that were all experiencing kind of the same thing, of reminding ourselves of what we can control, and I there there has been such a shift in me in the last, I would say two years for sure. I'm just saying, like, I'm not I'm not in control of this. I'm letting go of some of that. And when I see my coworkers stressing about, you know, there are position itself, there's things that we can't control. I see them stressing. I see them taking home that guilt. And I don't have that when I go home. I don't do work stuff. I do have email on my phone and I don't find that I need that boundary. I would much rather, because I'm a person with ADHD, I'm a person that would like to see the email come in and assess if I need to address that right now. But I also know that per my school board contract, I have 48 hours to respond to like a parent email or something like that. So I like to see it come in, but I don't need to remove email from my phone. I know from many people that work in the school system that is a healthy boundary to put of no, I'm not putting email on my phone, I'm not looking at email after work and that is completely valid. I also, when I get home, I take a nap like that is what gets me through the rest of the day. I have another job and not taking on too many speech jobs. When I first started, especially right after grad school, I think grad school instills this sort of fear in you that you're going to lose your skills. So I joined full time in a school, then I did PRN after school, and after school I did two hours at a private practice. I did all these other speech jobs and I burnt out. I see this with every CF that comes in. They're working multiple speech jobs and they burn out really quickly that they're thinking about speech all the time, and we need to have better boundaries about that.

Midroll:

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What should you target? What might a session look like? How can we build verbal routines that promote communication? And where do I start? I have two ebooks focused on late talkers that can help you answer those questions and more. You can find those on our website [SLP Happy hour.com](http://SLPHappyhour.com).

The first is a speech and language homework packet. I use this on days I just don't have time to plan. I look through the table of contents, pick a word to target, and then print out the corresponding page with play and routine ideas for that word, including some activities we can do in session. And each page has a parent strategy to practice at home. So whether you work with parents or work without them and want to send that sheet home, this is an often referred to resource they accompanying late talkers e-book walks through stages of communication development. And again we're talking analytic language learners birth to five more of the late talker population. And we will talk about imitation, exclamatory words, first words and phrases. Each of these sections have session ideas and play ideas to support whatever stage your student is in, so visit the link in the show notes to get this late talkers resource and make your sessions more organized, more effective, and less stressful.

Sarah: Let's talk a little bit about pacing, because I think that leaving work and leaving work at work is step one. And step two that a lot of people don't talk about is the pace of your day. So for example, Rachel, you saying, I'm going to take a lunch where I stop working because if we are frantically pushing ourselves to go at 110% during the day and we're going so fast, we're fulfilling the needs of other people, we're looking out for urgent problems, which there are always tons in the school system, we are going to completely exhaust ourselves. So what do you do to pace yourself throughout the day, or if that's a struggle for you, what have you done that hasn't worked?

Rachel: What's interesting is when I seen both contract SLPs and district SLP. So one of the negatives of being a contract SLP is you do not have a paid lunch like I do have a paid lunch. So what I see is that contract SLPs would rather work through their lunch or work through a 30 minute break unpaid break in order to leave 30 minutes early. So this is enforcing the system of lunches don't need to be honored. Then we have school based SLPs that are based at the same school, and they take a lunch, and then you see administration saying, well, this one's working through their lunch, they don't have a designated lunch, why can't you do that? So I think that we all need to be on a similar team, supporting each other within the school itself. If you work with another SLP there, you need to have each other's backs and say you do need to take like a break here, whether their contract and don't take a full lunch, take take a mini break, go, go take some deep breaths. Things stress us out. You need to pace your day. Whether you're working in the school system and you have direct service, direct service, and then you do a consultation as a little break, you're still doing a direct service, but you're taking a brain break. I think that is super helpful in helping the pace of your day, of adding in breaks when possible, within the scope of your profession.

Megan: I would wholeheartedly agree with that. I also had in mind, you know, and again, working, but giving yourself a little bit of a brain break of building in those documentation time again so that you've got time kind of going back to the paperwork that has to be done, so it may work for you whether it's I do a direct service, then I take a little mini break and document for that service before I go back out to do another service. If that is possible for you or if it works better for you to document all of the end of the day, or the first part of the next day. You know,

whatever works for you as an individual. It's really good to get in touch with yourself and know what works for you. Um, as far as when you're most ready to work. And so you can capitalize on those moments. And then if your brain dead by the end of the afternoon and you need to take some time to play on or, you know, research or whatever you're doing or documenting or whatever you need to do to get ready for the next day, you have that time frame. Um, as far as something that didn't work for me when I first started, I was coming out of a different environment where it was individual services, you know, a certain amount of time. And so I was trying my hardest to get small groups of kids that I could see these tiny bits of time. And then I was literally running around with like a crazy person. And I just thought, I can't do this and survive. So I, you know, made larger groups, I went in for longer periods of time as possible. So again, just playing with that schedule and knowing that your schedule is very flexible and it can and bend with you as it needs to.

Sarah: So what does that look like to sustainably work within the school system. And we've talked about some things already. Number one, you're not going to do it all. Number two, because there are so many students, the service looks. Different, and that doesn't mean that it's not really good service as a private practice SLP, I have students that see people, see SLPs in schools and oh my gosh, I see them. If they take a break with me, I see them still grow because they're being seen in the schools. And I think that one part of being a sustainable SLP in the schools is to not take this lens that we're taught in grad school to see each kid individually for 60 minutes in a week, or what we read and research. And to say, given my current constraints, how can I do the best job I can? So what does it look like to be a sustainable school SLP for you, Megan?

Megan: It looking at the amount of kids and figuring out how I can bring them. Because in my head that particularly like I'm doing a lot of push in. So my goal is basically help out of a job and these classrooms, because I want the teacher and the paraprofessionals to the mini SLP and be able to implement these communication strategies that I'm modeling for them when I'm in the classroom, so that they can continue, them when I leave. Um, so that kids are constantly getting that language immersion. So that's been very sustainable for me in one dimension therapy and maybe doing some bigger groups and doing whole group. I've also been doing a lot of collaboration with occupational therapy, which helps build that camaraderie between the professionals, but also allows us to really hit all the needs of our students.

Rachel: Megan, what you said about trying to make many SLPs, I agree with you completely. One of the things that I always suggest is modeling. That is the best way that I know to show my skills to another person that I'm collaborating with, whether it's a teacher, a para, an occupational therapist, whoever it is that's working with the same students, and our goals are similar goals, not necessarily IEP goals of just helping the students succeed in different ways, whatever their goals are. So I like to do push in services whenever possible. I know in high school in the gen ed setting, it's hard to do that because one of the tenants that I try to keep to as a trauma informed SLP is not causing harm, and one of the concerns of high school students receiving speech services is that they're embarrassed. They're embarrassed to be in speech. So it is hard for me to justify going into a Gen Ed classroom and sitting there with a student who

needs language services. But what I do find is going into a support facilitators classroom and my district, we have a learning strategies classroom. So those are all students who are labeled ESE they love the help in that room. They're like, oh, miss A is here. And doesn't matter if they don't have speech, they want help for whatever it is. So I think modeling in those classrooms as well, with the support facilitator with other professionals is super helpful, um, to, I guess, address the sustainability of this career in the school system. And the collaboration is just a huge aspect of that, because having a negative collaborative experience or just, you know, colleagues not respecting each other can make a workplace toxic. So we really have to prioritize that relationship as well.

Sarah: So that might be a nice thing to touch on is how do we know for working in a toxic SLP environment? Uh, for me it was an environment where I couldn't do anything right, where I was asked to do too much, where there was a lot of, like, backbiting or gossip, where people were actively working to undermine each other. And it's been rare. But the only thing I've been able to do within a toxic environment is to leave that environment. So I would say a toxic environment is one in which the people working there, or the system is so dysfunctional that it keeps you from doing the job you need to do. So what are some examples that you could each give me as things that maybe early career professionals should look for in a school job that is not sustainable? Number one, I would say, is if your administrator is not supportive, if your administrator is going to not ask you for more information, if there's a conflict and immediately side with the other person, or if there's a lot of gossip or undercutting of each other, or not listening to each other in the setting.

Rachel: I think one thing that immediately pops up to me is within IEP meetings, we need to come in as a team. Um, so one thing that I experience is that we address that IEPs are a team decision. What ends up happening is the SLP's professional opinion is discarded because other people, other professionals disagree. And that might be for personal reasons or for whatever. So that could look like an SLP recommends 30 minutes for a student for one week. Well, then a support facilitator or a school psychologist says no, 60 minutes and we're doing this in front of parents. We're not having these discussions ahead of time and you're just kind of jumping down each other's throats. I think that better communication needs to be had. Um, whether that's a conversation before of how you would like to address services, um, how to best suggest those expectations. Um, I think that administration, one of their biggest roles, needs to be encouraging workplace communication and good, healthy workplace communication. So having trainings on what that looks like, asking questions I tell everyone I gentle parent, all professionals I work with, everyone I work with. I'm like, let's say that in a different way. And I think that is a way to get things done in a healthy manner instead of screaming at each other, um, or even just discounting what a professional is saying, we need to work on that a lot.

Megan: Yeah, I think that both of what you guys have both mentioned is very accurate and unfortunately things I have seen. So definitely those are things to look out for. I think just a general idea of how we did when you first arrive at a place as well, if people are welcoming, if the professionals are going to be collaborating, with are willing to help you. Especially if you're starting a new position where you're naturally going to have a million and one questions. Do you

feel comfortable even asking one person, even if there's just one person there? Ideally, we would want everyone to be open and willing to question. Um, but at least if you could get one person to answer your questions, then you feel comfortable going to them and being vulnerable and asking questions. I think that's really important to have that. And if you don't feel like you have that, then being able to go to your administration and asking, you know, who do I need to be asking these questions to? I'm having trouble. And being able to have those open, kind of vulnerable conversations is an important thing. And I would think it would be difficult to work with in an environment where you didn't have that opportunity.

Sarah: So if we're describing some characteristics of an unhealthy workplace, let's flip the coin and talk about the other side. What would a healthy workplace look like? And for me, that would be what I mentioned a moment ago, where the administrator and my coworkers are not going to be reactive. If there's any issues with other staff or parents who will stay calm, try to gather some information and talk to us both. That makes for a really healthy environment and just having a rapport with coworkers that is kind and that is supportive.

Megan: Things that are collaborative and that allow you to go to someone and ask for help. Or if someone comes to you and asks for help, that you're willing to provide that help if it's within your boundary that that obviously or and if it's not, and you waste those boundaries that they're accepted that people can say no, you know and not be frustrated. But if you're setting a healthy boundaries for yourself, I think that that is. And having the ability to collaborate. I know that the school and the administration that I'm working under now, I know that our all of the and she welcome any discussions any questions and we'll sit and listen. So just having those listening ears.

Rachel: I would agree with everything Megan said. And on top of that, I think that our administrators, as well as the staff, every one of us need to be trained on trauma informed care, especially the people above us, our administrators, so that they are not causing trauma to us. And that makes it a toxic environment, which then possibly adds to the risk of us causing harm to our students, which is the farthest thing from what we want to do. We want to help. So we all need to be trained in how to communicate with others. Um, boundary setting - super important. But yes, I agree with everything that Megan said.

Sarah: So let's talk about SLPs who might be listening, who are looking at either getting into the school setting or changing schools. And first of all, as an SLP, you have permission to change jobs. So I know that some some positions, you have to wait until the end of the school year. But I want everyone listening to know it's okay to go to another job. The school district is responsible for finding another person. You aren't responsible for that. You don't need to carry that load.

Rachel: We need to be taking care of ourselves first. I understand when people have such guilt about it that they don't want to leave the kids, that it's just other factors that are making it tough to work there. You need to take care of yourself first. You cannot pour from an empty cup. There are other factors that go into it that people threaten patient abandonment or whatever issues, like you need to look into your contracts and see if they give you like a 30 day timeline that you

need to quit ahead of time and try to stick to those other, um, parts of the contract, some are like not enforceable. So if you have a lawyer in the family, look at those things, that would be super helpful. You do not need to stay in a job. And one of the things working in a female dominated profession is the toxic positivity or the statements like remember your why you're here for the kids, not for the salary. Well, the salary is how we survive. We can't just have this view of, well, you're here to support the kids. Nothing else matters. You need to take care of yourself first and that is completely valid.

Sarah: So if there is an SLP who's listening, who wants to find another SLP job, maybe they're feeling a little bit of guilt, but they're going to look for a job, let's say at another district. What are things they can proactively do to sort of get the tea on how supportive the district is or how supportive the building is. What should they look for?

Rachel: I would say the first thing that comes to mind for me is within interviews you're allowed to interview. Unless it says in your contract you're not able to interview. That's another thing, but you should be taking other interviews. You have the right to ask whoever you're interviewing with about, like, why didn't that work for the last person in this position? Or what are some what is the culture like here? Can I do a tour of the place? Can I talk to some people? Like ask these questions because someone might say, yes, I'd be willing to talk to you, and maybe they're not going to be 100% truthful or something, but you can kind of get the vibe of what's going on there. And I think those questions need to be asked. You have to ask those questions, and you can Google some other great questions to ask of the person you're interviewing with, to understand what the culture is of the place that you're going into. There's awesome suggestions out there, but those are the first things that just come to mind. For me, it is completely acceptable, and you should be asking those questions before you enter a place that you're willing to take a risk that it's going to be better or worse for you over there.

Megan: Yeah, I wholeheartedly agree. I think that actually those questions and gathering that information, and I love the idea of asking for a tour because regardless of what people might say or try to sugarcoat it because they might want to fill the position holy, I would think that it would be that tour of a facility unannounced, that people you would be able to read people and kind of get a feel of that culture, being able to go to a variety of different places you know, a variety of for classroom that like that, to be able to meet a variety of things, incentives, things that might be hand picked or anything like that, so that you could really get a feel for the culture and what the environment is like.

Sarah: And as we close out the show for any school SLPs who are listening, I just wanted to say you're probably doing a much, much better job than you think you are. You're probably not giving yourself enough credit because as a private practice SLP, seeing the kids that I see who also see their school SLP, their school SLPs are doing a great job. I know that imposter syndrome can be strong when you have a generalist position where you're seeing an entire school of kids with so many different needs, but I don't think that you have to be a specialist and know everything about everything in order to really support kids and to facilitate really great progress for them. And that's what I see the SLPs, the school SLPs that I that come into my

realm doing is making a really big difference, even though the therapy doesn't look like they'd like it to look. In an ideal situation,

Megan: I would kind of hard actually think. I think about that, but I feel I feel these emotion sometimes. As a school SLP currently working in. I would say if you're feeling those emotions, vocalize them. Talk to people about them. Talk to colleagues about that. I have another SLP on campus or someone that you feel comfortable being able to talk to, whether that a fellow teacher or someone like that, and voice those concerns and just having that ability to get it off your chest and, you know, reflecting back on, you know, looking at what you've done during the week, throughout the year and looking back and seeing the progress that your students have made and all the achievements that they have made and that you have done.

Rachel: I've been talking about this recently to one of the people that I support, and coming from the private practice realm that she's working one on one with clients, she will tell me she isn't doing anything here. She's not helping in the school system. And one of the conversations that I've been having with her is like, let's change that deficit mindset. How can you help when you are here? Um, I understand having eight kids in a group or six kids in a group is not what you want, especially when coming from one kid at a time, but to say that it's not helpful, those expectations are going to eat at you. You can't. So you have to take away that control of, say, how can I best serve my clients here within the constraints of the school system? And I have to tell you the best sessions that I've ever had, it doesn't matter if there's seven kids in the group. That group is so tight with, you know, working together and having lifelong friendships. And that's not the goal of it. The goal is, you know, working with those students' goals on the IEP and getting them to meet certain criteria that that they're looking for. But you have to just change that mindset to how can I best help here? Not that it's not helping at all.

Sarah: Yeah. And it's changing your mindset from this is impossible to this is not ideal and I am still affecting change. Anything else either one of you would like to share with our audience before we close the show?

Megan: I would just continue to motivate the school SLP, I love what you just said Sarah that this may not be ideal. I'm still being effective, and I'm still making change. It's what is actually being done in therapy. So know that you're doing well, even if your environment doesn't feel ideal at the moment.

Rachel: And what I want to tell you all out there is that when you are unhappy with change and it's eating at you, try to ask yourselves how you can help with change or the things that you are upset with within the school district. Can you help with change? So one of the things that I was able to do was increase the SLP supplement. That was something that I had been saying, you know, I'm unhappy with the salary here. I'm I'm building a task force that we can get this done. And it took a year or two, but we did it. And that was a goal that we work toward. There's other things within your school system or your district, wherever you are, that you might be unhappy with. Ask yourself how you can advocate for change in that area, whether it's in your school

itself or the larger district, or the government. We are knowledgeable about the systems that we work in, and they need us to advocate for ourselves, for the future of other SLPs.

Sarah: And that's it for today's episode of the SLP Happy Hour podcast. Thank you so much to Rachel and Megan for that very thoughtful conversation. And before you leave, I just want to remind you what we wrapped up this conversation with, that you are impacting change and affecting change more than you give yourself credit for. You are doing a good job. You are changing the lives of the people you work with, and we can get so stuck in this idea of what A+ speech therapy should look like. But you know what? None of us work in A+ systems. Many of us work within systems that are very bureaucratic. There are lots of rules. We have high caseloads. And so if we aren't working within a system that allows us to do A+ work, we're going to do the best we can, and we're going to recognize the work we're doing within the systems we work in, and we're going to remind ourselves that we make a difference.

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