

# Sara Ayars

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**Assistive Technology Specialist and Speech Language Pathologist** with 16+ years of experience in public education, I specialize in Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and addressing the communication needs of students aged 3 to 21 in diverse educational settings. I am dedicated to fostering inclusivity, promoting accessibility, and facilitating meaningful educational experiences.

## Experience

JUNE 2018 - PRESENT

### **Assistive Technology Specialist | Bellevue School District | Bellevue, WA**

Provide comprehensive training, support, and professional development (PD) to facilitate accessibility and inclusion. Advocate for best practices in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and technology to ensure equitable access for all learners. Collaborate with a diverse range of stakeholders, including students, families, educators, therapists, specialists, administrators, and support staff, to develop and implement assistive technology solutions. Focus on coaching and collaboration with staff to create effective Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems for students aged 3-21. Coordinate efforts among families, vendors, and therapists to secure independent funding for dedicated AAC devices. Spearheaded district-wide implementation of Core Vocabulary through a Specific Learning System First approach.

AUGUST 2023 - PRESENT

### **Assistive Technology Specialist | Special Education Technology Center | Ellensburg, WA**

Offer specialized support in Assistive Technology (AT) through consultation, technical assistance, and professional development to K-12 special education personnel across Washington school districts. Develop and distribute monthly newsletters focusing on topics that intersect AT and inclusive practices.

DECEMBER 2023 – MARCH 2024

### **Assistive Technology Specialist | Bellingham Public Schools | Bellingham, WA**

Conduct Professional Development sessions for the Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) group on subjects including Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and Inclusive Practices. Deliver Professional Development sessions and offer individualized coaching to educators district-wide on emergent literacy strategies.

AUGUST 2007 – JUNE 2023

### **Speech Language Pathologist | Bellevue School District | Bellevue, WA**

Screen, assess, and deliver therapy services, including co-teaching and in-class interventions, to students with moderate and severe communication disorders across preschool to fifth-grade levels in both special and regular education classrooms. Proficiently develop and program AAC devices tailored to the needs of emerging, context-

dependent, and independent communicators, utilizing a range of high-, mid-, and low-tech devices and software. Collaborate extensively with general and special education teachers, private Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs), occupational therapists (OTs), physical therapists (PTs), psychologists, Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs), para-educators, other support staff, and parents. Place particular emphasis on training and coaching teachers and support staff to offer comprehensive support for students with Complex Communication Needs.

AUGUST 2020 – JUNE 2023

**Teaching & Learning Department | Bellevue School District | Bellevue, WA**

Collaborate with directors, curriculum developers, Instructional Technology Curriculum Leaders, members of the Multi-Language Learning Department, and other leaders to develop and promote district initiatives, as well as provide Professional Development opportunities for staff across Bellevue School District.

JUNE 2020 – JUNE 2023

**Speech Language Pathology Advisory Group | Bellevue School District | Bellevue, WA**

Serve in an elected leadership role for the Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) team. Design and facilitate Professional Development sessions for the SLP group, addressing and resolving caseload and workload issues as they arose.

JANUARY 2014 – JUNE 2018

**Speech Language Pathologist District Compliance Evaluator | Bellevue School District | Bellevue, WA**

Review Speech-Language Impairment evaluation reports district-wide in compliance with district, state, and federal regulations. Provide training to SLP staff on updated district, state, and federal guidelines.

JUNE 2010 – AUGUST 2011

**Augmentative Communication Specialist | Seattle Children's Hospital | Seattle, WA**

Conduct Augmentative Alternative Communication assessments, dynamic evaluations, and trial treatments for children aged 3-21 with complex communication needs. Collaborate with family members, private Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs), school teams, and support staff to facilitate device programming, setup, training, and implementation. Manage paperwork for device funding through Medicaid and various insurance companies.

AUGUST 2010 – OCTOBER 2013

**Technical Assistance Team Autism Consultant | Bellevue School District | Bellevue, WA**

Engage in specialized training conducted by University of Washington staff. Use evidence-based practices to support Autistic students and their general education teachers and other support staff.

## **Education**

SEPTEMBER 2001 – JUNE 2005

## **Bachelor of Science: Speech and Hearing Sciences, Psychology | University of Washington | Seattle, WA**

Graduated Cum Laude AUGUST 2005 – AUGUST 2007

## **Master of Science: Speech Language Pathology | University of Washington | Seattle, WA**

Successfully fulfilled mandatory coursework and clinical practica, supplemented by additional studies in counseling skills, educating children with emotional/behavioral disorders, and educating Autistic children. Acquired proficiency with Prompts for Restructuring Oral Motor Phonetic Targets (PROMPT). Gained substantial experience in dynamic assessment and trial treatment to assess candidacy for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) under the guidance of Dr. Pat Dowden.

JANUARY 2007 – JUNE 2007

## **Public School Internship | Snoqualmie Valley School District | Snoqualmie, WA**

Developed and executed assessment and treatment plans for speech and language disorders within the elementary and middle schools of the district catering to students with complex communication and physical needs.

## **Professional Memberships and Certificates**

- Certified member of American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA), 2008 - present
- ASHA Special Interest Group 12: Augmentative Alternative Communication Member, 2008 - present
- Washington State Department of Health Certificate, Speech Language Pathology, 2010 - present
- Washington State Educational Staff Associate (ESA) Certification, 2007 - present

## **Assistive Technology and AAC Programming Skills**

- Hardware: iPad, Tobii I-series, Accent, Smartbox, Step by Step, Communication Builder, GoTalk, switches, environmental controls
- Software: Boardmaker, Boom Learning, Chat Editor, Clicker 8, Empower, HelpKidzLearn, LessonPix, Microsoft Suite (Teams, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, OneNote, Lens), WordQ
- Applications: Proloquo2Go, TouchChat with Word Power, LAMP WFL, GoTalk NOW, TD Snap, Grid 3, Proloquo4Text, Verbally, SimPODD, Clicker Writer, Voice Dream Reader, Bookshare

## **Lectures, Webinars, and Courses Given**

### **Regional/Statewide**

- [The Big Core Roll-Out: One District's Plan to Implement Core Vocabulary](#)- Special Education Technology Center, December 2020
- [Building Capacity for AAC Implementation in Large School Districts](#)- Special Education Technology Center, November 2021
- [Literacy for ALL: One District's Start to Emergent Literacy Instruction](#)- Special Education Technology Center, November 2022
- SETC Emerging Literacy Retreat: Learn, Collaborate, and Create
- AT Chatter Series, Supports for Early Childhood- Special Education Technology Center, January to March 2024

### **Bellevue School District**

- Facilitated 7+ years of AAC Group and designed PD around various topics including Neurodiversity Affirming Practices, Accessing AAC through Eye Gaze, How to Coach Teachers and Paras to Implement AAC, AAC Assessment, Writing AAC Evaluation Reports, Treatment for AAC Users, Writing AAC Goals
  - Empowering Learners with Universal Design for Learning
  - Teaching AAC users in the Inclusive Classroom
  - Emerging Literacy Strategies and Tools to Support the Diverse Learner
  - Age-Respectful Activities for Secondary Students
  - Core Vocabulary, Aided Language Stimulation, Descriptive Teaching, Oh My!
  - AAC and Core Vocabulary for OTs and PTs
  - AAC 101 Four Part Series for Para Educators
  - Supporting AAC users with the Descriptive Teaching Model
  - Core Vocabulary Implementation for Special Education Teachers
  - Universal Communication Design for Teachers
  - Universal Communication Design for Para Educators
  - Supporting Emergent AAC Users in the Classroom
  - Putting Aided Language to Practice
  - Introduction to Core Vocabulary
  - Teaching with Core Words
  - AAC and Core Vocabulary in the Preschool Classroom
  - AAC and Core Vocabulary in the Inclusive Middle School
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- General Tips for the Para Educator Teaching AAC
  - Communication Support for the Early Childhood Classroom
  - Practical Integration of AAC in the Classroom
  - Universal Design for Learning Overview
  - Independent Writing and Informative Feedback
  - Independent Writing and Alternative Pencils
  - Shared Reading
  - SLP Apps for Therapy
  - Supporting Literacy for Emerging Communicators
  - AAC, Core Boards, and Tier One Support Interventions
  - Accessible Literacy Learning
  - Adaptive Literacy for Non-Speaking Students
  - Alphabet and Phonological Awareness for Emerging Communicators
  - Everyone Has a Voice: Augmentative and Alternative Communication
  - Predictable Chart Writing
  - Practical Tips for Including Students with Complex Communication Needs
  - Model as a Master Pal
  - Technical Support for Assistive Technology Software
  - Various technical trainings including: Boardmaker, Clicker8, HelpKidzLearn, LessonPix, Boom Learning

### **Bellingham School District**

- A Tiered Approach to AAC Implementation
- Comprehensive Literacy Series with Coaching Cycles: Learn, Collaborate, and Create
- Empowering Every Voice with Core Vocabulary