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Association

KENTUCKY
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association



*Setting the P·A·C·E
for our Profession*

**The Essence of Communication in Action:
A Look Back at the 2026 KSHA Convention**

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President's Message

KSHA 2026: A Strong Start to the Year

Anne Blandford, SLPD, CCC-SLP
KSHA President



It's already been a busy and exciting year for KSHA! Our Annual Convention in February brought together more than 1,200 attendees, and it was such a great opportunity to connect with members and

students from across the state. The energy, shared knowledge and sense of community throughout the Convention were truly inspiring.


One of the standout moments for me was the Luncheon Keynote. Even though the speaker couldn't join us in person, her presentation using augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), along with her perspective as someone living with autism, made a lasting impact. It was a powerful reminder of why we do what we do and the importance of truly listening to the voices of those we serve.

As we head into the second quarter of 2026, KSHA continues to stay active at the state level. We've maintained a strong presence in Frankfort, advocating for Kentucky's speech-

language pathologists and audiologists. A big highlight: our Governmental Affairs Chair, Kellie Ellis, successfully advocated for the inclusion of SLPs and AUDs in the Workforce Development Fund through HB 266—an important win for our professions.

We're also continuing work on a direct-to-licensure pathway and participation in the Audiology & Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact (ASLP-IC), both of which will help support our workforce and increase professional mobility.

In addition, our past presidents and board are staying engaged in discussions around potential changes to billing code 92507. We know how important this is to your day-to-day work and will share updates as soon as we have more clarity.

It's truly an honor to serve as KSHA president this year. I'm grateful for such an engaged and passionate membership. Thank you for everything you do—you continue to inspire us to keep pushing for progress for our professions and for the individuals and families we serve. 

Emerging Leaders



These outstanding students from our Kentucky CSD programs were nominated by their faculty as Emerging Leaders and participated in leadership training at the 2026 KSHA Convention.

The Essence of Communication in Action: A Look Back at the 2026 KSHA Convention

Brittany McAndrew, MA, CCC-SLP, BCS-S, CBIS and Chelsea Graham, MS, CCC-SLP
KSHA Convention Co-Chairs



The 2026 Kentucky Speech-Language-Hearing Association (KSHA) Convention brought to life this year's theme, *The Essence of Communication: Empowering Minds, Transforming Lives*, in ways that were both inspiring and impactful. Held February 18–20 in Lexington, the convention welcomed 1,207 attendees (174 student members) representing 16 states and two countries, reflecting the strength and reach of our professional community. Participants had the opportunity to earn 21.5 continuing education hours, reinforcing our shared commitment to lifelong learning and excellence in practice.

From the opening day, the energy was unmistakable. Adria Thompson's keynote session inspired us to recall the difference we make in the lives of our clients, and set the tone for thoughtful exploration of social media ethics, innovation and clinical practice.

Attendees engaged deeply with topics ranging from the post pandemic skills gap to building competence and confidence: supervision in speech-language pathology and audiology, while reconnecting with colleagues and exploring exhibits showcasing the latest resources and technologies.

Thursday's full schedule of sessions, poster presentations and networking opportunities highlighted the depth and diversity of expertise within our field. Thanks to the strong presence of our NSSLHA members, the student-led silent auction and Golden Brain competition were both highly attended. These events fostered collaboration, friendly competition and student engagement. Murray State and University of Louisville demonstrated their competitive spirits and strong minds by tying! Their knowledge, teamwork and enthusiasm are a testament to the bright future of our profession.

This year's program also featured uniquely meaningful perspectives on communication through two sessions led by parent-child presenters. Laura Mize, MS, CCC-SLP, and her daughter Macy Usher, MS, CCC-SLP, offered a powerful and personal look at early childhood communication development and the lived experiences that shape our work. Tina Brock, MA, CCC-SLP and her son, Nick Brock, MS, CCC-SLP provided valuable guidance on The SLP's Role

in addressing mental health. These sessions resonated deeply with attendees, reminding us of the human stories at the core of our practice.

Friday's programming provided a fitting conclusion, with inspiring sessions, recognition of member achievements and a dynamic luncheon presentation by Catlaina Vrana, AAC user that shared her lived experience and journey to communicate.

The Convention closed with a renewed sense of purpose and connection, equipping participants with fresh ideas and practical strategies to bring back to their workplaces and communities.

The success of the 2026 KSHA Convention reflects the dedication, passion and collaboration of our members, presenters, volunteers and partners. Together, we not only explored the essence of communication—we embodied it.

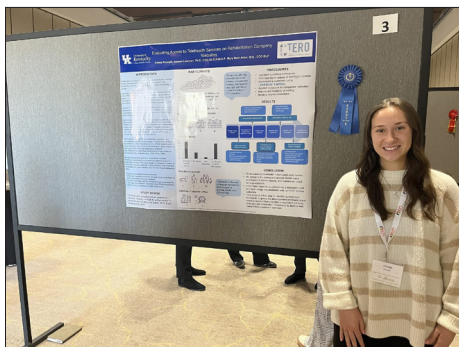


Posters at KSHA

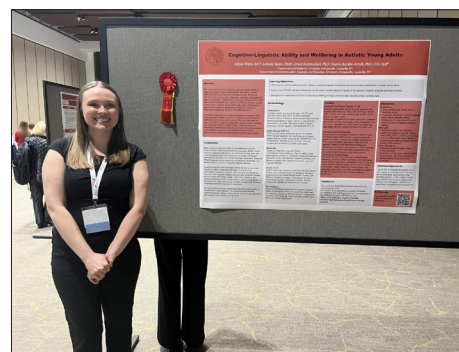
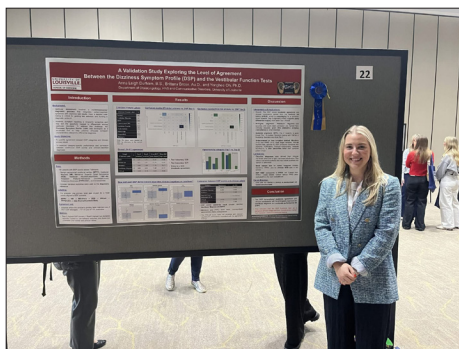
Maria Bane, PhD, CCC-SLP

The Poster Presentations at the KSHA 2026 annual Convention took place on Thursday, February 19, 2026, at the Central Bank Center in Lexington, Kentucky. As a key component of the Convention's scholarly programming, the session drew many Convention attendees and created a lively atmosphere filled with discussion and engagement. Attendees had the opportunity to earn continuing education units (CEUs) while exploring a wide range of research and clinical work. In total, 23 posters were presented by students and professionals from across Kentucky.

Poster presentations are an important part of the Convention because they encourage students and professionals to contribute to the evidence base in speech-language pathology and audiology through systematic inquiry. For many students, the poster session introduces dissemination of research and engagement in professional dialogue. Posters may represent undergraduate research projects, clinical work or scholarship connected to graduate theses or dissertations. The event also highlights the strong culture of professional mentorship across Kentucky, celebrating the faculty and clinicians who support students in developing and presenting their work.



Poster judging was conducted by 10 volunteer professionals who generously contributed their time and expertise. KSHA extends sincere thanks to these volunteers, whose participation helps make the poster session and awards possible each year.



We congratulate this year's award recipients. In the Undergraduate Student Poster category, Emma Penewit (University of Kentucky) received first place and Sophie Dranick (University of Kentucky) received second place.

In the Graduate Student Poster category, Anna Leigh Duram (University of Louisville) received first place and Jillian Winn (University of Louisville) received second place.



The Professional Poster Award was presented to Heather Gaddis, MS, CCC-SLP, CDP.

The poster presentation event continues to provide a valuable opportunity to recognize scholarship, foster mentorship and highlight the innovative work conducted by students and professionals across Kentucky in the fields of speech-language pathology and audiology.



Celebrating Excellence: 2026 KSHA Award Recipients

Allison Hatcher, PhD, CCC-SLP, KSHA Honors and Awards Chair

Each year, the Kentucky Speech-Language-Hearing Association (KSHA) proudly recognizes individuals whose dedication, leadership and service have made a lasting impact on our professions and the people we serve. We are honored to announce the recipients of this year's distinguished KSHA awards.

KSHA Honors



As one of the highest recognitions bestowed by KSHA, the KSHA Honors of the Association Award celebrates exceptional educational, professional and administrative achievement, as well as outstanding service to the association. This year's recipient, Donna Morris, MA, CCC-SLP, exemplifies the very best of our profession through sustained excellence and meaningful contributions to KSHA and the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Johanna B. Hancock Award



The Johanna B. Hancock Award recipient was chosen for her outstanding dedication and service to the KSHA Membership as an executive council member. Over the

years Leigh Anne Roden, EdD, CCC-SLP, has been an invaluable contributor to the success of KSHA, its members and the vision of the Association.

KSHA Certificate of Appreciation



The Certificate of Appreciation recognizes individuals who are not KSHA members, speech-language pathologists or audiologists, yet have gone above and beyond in supporting individuals with communication disorders or advancing our professions. We are pleased to recognize John and Linda Kelly (pictured) and Doug Shearer for their commitment, advocacy and community impact.


KSHA PACE Setter Award

The PACE Setter Award highlights members who demonstrate exemplary service aligned with KSHA's mission of Professional Development, Advocacy, Collaboration, and Education. This year's PACE Setters are, Mrs. Holly Hamill and Dr. Laura Glastetter-Stone. They both have truly inspired colleagues and strengthened our field through leadership and service that really sets the pace.

KSHA-ASHF Clinical Achievement Award



The KSHA-ASHF Clinical Achievement Award honors a member for significant contributions to clinical practice within the past six years. Congratulations to Anne Olson, PhD, CCC-A, whose innovative clinical work and dedication to evidence-based practice in audiology have elevated services for individuals and families across Kentucky. As this year's recipient, she will also represent Kentucky as the nominee for the ASHF Louis M. DiCarlo Award for Outstanding Recent Clinical Achievement at the ASHA Convention.

All recipients were recognized at the KSHA Annual Luncheon during the KSHA Convention. We extend our sincere congratulations and gratitude to these outstanding professionals and community partners whose work continues to shape and strengthen our professions. 

KSHA 2026 Scholarship Winners

Steckol Memorial Fund Scholarship

By Hannah Melton



I am honored to be the recipient of the Steckol Memorial Fund Scholarship. Being a full time teacher while earning my master's degree

in speech-language pathology has been extremely difficult. However, the sacrifices required have been made easier by my passion for this field and commitment to serving future students. Receiving recognition for my efforts from my future colleagues at the Kentucky Speech-Language-Hearing Association has been incredibly encouraging and motivates me to continue persevering through the demands of graduate school. I am grateful to the members of KSHA for their passion and dedication to the field, as well as their belief in me as a future clinician.

I am a first-year graduate student at Western Kentucky University's online speech-language pathology program. I have been a high school science teacher for the last four years. My favorite part of my job has been encouraging my students and watching their confidence grow as they learn new skills. That experience, along with my childhood experiences as a recipient of Head Start and school speech services, inspired me to pursue a career as an SLP. Upon graduation, I hope to serve my community as a school-based SLP.

The Steckol Memorial Fund Scholarship has greatly lessened the financial burden of graduate school. I have carefully budgeted my educator's salary to pay tuition, rent and bills without relying on student loans. Next year, however, I will be unable to work during clinical externships. This summer, as part of WKU's online program requirements, I will complete in-person clinical experiences on campus in Bowling Green. The scholarship funds I have received from KSHA will go towards my summer tuition. I am excited to fully engage in this experience as I continue my journey in becoming a well-prepared SLP.

Stanley Memorial Scholarship

By Piper Austin



My name is Piper Austin. I am a senior graduating with my bachelor's degree in Communication Sciences and Disorders from

Murray State University in May, and I will begin the graduate program in the fall. I am truly honored to have been awarded the Bev Stanley Memorial Scholarship. The scholarship has already allowed me to branch out and form meaningful connections with individuals involved in KSHA's day-to-day functioning, including Heather Gaddis, Robyn Wahl and many other amazing speech therapists. I hope to use the funds to purchase textbooks and help build my personal resource library developed from the materials that will guide me through graduate school and the first few years in a professional career setting. The textbooks and print resources will help prepare me for the Praxis exam and my future endeavors as a clinical-based SLP. After purchasing textbooks and required school materials, the remaining funds will be used to reduce the financial burden of tuition. The scholarship will help alleviate some of the financial stress that weighs heavily on me as I begin my graduate school journey, allowing me to focus on learning advancements instead of scheduling conflicts associated with multiple jobs. I will be able to focus my full attention on education instead of worrying about tuition. This award encourages me to continue in the CSD field and helps push me to achieve my goals without the fear of textbooks and educational resources being inaccessible. Being able to purchase these resources will significantly impact my learning, enhance my knowledge and contribute to personal growth as an aspiring SLP.

RISE Scholarship

By Maggie Harrison




Receiving the KSHA RISE Scholarship has been a great honor and a blessing as I continue my journey towards becoming an SLP. This award represents not only financial support,

but serves as a reminder that we can all rise above our circumstances and make a difference in our community.

My interest in speech-language pathology grew from both personal and professional experiences. I was raised in a multicultural family and spent my early childhood living in several countries before moving to the United States. By the age of five, I was attempting to learn English as a third language. This proved to be extremely challenging, but this experience left an indelible impression on my life as I witnessed my weaknesses slowly transform into strengths and my desire to help individuals who experience difficulties with language and communication grow.

Over the past 10 years, I have worked in public schools as an English Language Learner (ELL) assistant and speech-language technician. In these roles, I have had the privilege of supporting students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Working closely with speech-language pathologists and educators strengthened my desire to pursue this profession and deepened my commitment to helping students find their voices.

My professional goal is to continue working in a school-based setting and become a bilingual SLP who can support diverse student populations. I am particularly passionate about helping children develop the communication skills needed for academic success and meaningful connection with others.

The KSHA RISE Scholarship will help ease the financial demands of my graduate education and allow me to continue learning from inspiring expert teachers at Murray State University. I am deeply grateful for this support and look forward to serving students, families and communities as I continue my journey in speech-language pathology. 

Therapy Corner

Females With Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Short Tutorial for SLPs

Jenny M. Burton, PhD, CCC-SLP, Western Kentucky University

Challenges in social communication and the presence of repetitive behaviors and interests that interfere with daily activities are core symptoms of autism spectrum disorder (ASD; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). ASD currently affects approximately 1 in 31 children (3.2%) in the U.S. (Shaw, 2025). A consistent sex disparity has been observed in ASD, with males diagnosed more frequently than females. When considering the entire population of children with ASD, males are three (Shaw, 2025) to four times (Maenner et al., 2023) more likely to be affected than females. This disparity has yielded a large body of literature that reflects a male symptom profile, with less information known about the female profile. This is problematic since typical females are known to have strengths in the underpinnings of social communication and lower or different types of repetitive behaviors and interests when compared to males (Cruz et al., 2024). SLPs and related professionals, who are often involved in the assessment and treatment of ASD, may therefore face challenges when providing services to females. In this article, I will address the following: a) define the current theories that attempt to explain the etiology of the sex disparity in ASD, and b) clinical considerations for the assessment and treatment of females with ASD.

Etiology of the Sex Disparity in ASD

Three main theories have emerged in the literature to explain the etiology of the sex disparity in ASD. The Female Protective Effect argues that having female chromosomes biologically protects females from ASD. Since females have XX chromosomes, they have two copies of many genes. If

one gene is mutated, the second copy may function as a backup and operate normally. Males have XY chromosomes, which means they have fewer copies of genes than females. If a male has a mutated gene, there is no backup. Thus, females with ASD may require a greater number of genes, also known as greater genetic loading to be diagnosed. On the other hand, fewer genes may be involved when females present with mild ASD symptoms (Werling & Geschwind, 2013).

Diagnostic bias is the second theory that attempts to explain the sex disparity in ASD (Haney, 2016). This theory argues that current diagnostic criteria for ASD were validated on predominantly male samples, which may not account for females' relative strengths in social communication and differences in the expression of repetitive behaviors and interests. Thus, the diagnostic criteria may be skewed toward capturing the well-established male presentation of symptoms, resulting in a reduced sensitivity in detecting females.

Females with ASD may also mask or camouflage their symptoms. Masking enables them to conceal their symptoms, creating the impression of stronger social interaction skills than may actually be present. Consequently, camouflaging may result in under- or misdiagnosis of females with ASD (Hull, Petrides, & Mandy, 2020).

Considerations for the Assessment and Treatment of Females with ASD

When screening and assessing females with suspected ASD, clinicians should interpret the scores of frequently used ASD-specific measures with caution—especially borderline scores. Most measures

were validated using predominantly male samples. For example, the Social Communication Questionnaire – Lifetime form (Rutter, Bailey, & Lord, 2003) and the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule – 2nd Edition (ADOS-2; Lord et al., 2012) are often used in clinics; however, both measures were validated on predominantly male samples with a ratio of three times as many males as females. Females were not scored separately. Consequently, these measures may only capture girls more severely affected by ASD and may not be sensitive to detecting females with milder symptoms. They may not account for females' relative strengths or advantages in social aspects of communication, or for possible differences in the expression of restricted-repetitive behaviors or interests (Cruz et al., 2024). Clinicians should consider sex, along with other sources of information, including ASD-specific measures, chronological age, intellectual skills, adaptive behavior, language, and parent and/or teacher report, as part of a comprehensive assessment process (Burton et al., 2025).

When treating females with ASD, clinicians should keep in mind that this group will have challenges in social communication compared to their female peers, but they are likely to present with relative strengths due to female advantages in social cognition, language development, and nonverbal aspects of communication (Burton et al., 2020). SLPs should prioritize working as part of a multidisciplinary team alongside parents and/or teachers, and the individual with ASD to establish treatment priorities and goals (Will et al., 2018). Treatment activities that specifically address challenges more commonly faced by

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Therapy Corner *(continued from page 5)*


females should be considered. For example, navigating friendships and social boundaries, communication of needs, emotions, and self advocacy, and targeting more complex social inferencing and perspective taking may benefit females with ASD (Attwood et al., 2019).

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Convention Thanks

J. Nikki Gaylord
Editor

Thank you to the team at Craven Management Associates, particularly Melissa Joseph, KSHA Account Manager, for their work on the logistics and details of the KSHA Convention. 



SLP Spotlight

Beyond the Expected: An SLP Mother's Experience With Esophageal Atresia

Mary Grace Starks, MS, CCC-SLP



My son was born in the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in June 2020. When he came into the world, not only did he bring us great joy, but he brought with

him a great surprise! Micah was born with esophageal atresia (EA)-tracheoesophageal fistula (TEF) less than 24 hours after birth. Like I said, he brought with him a great surprise.

To start his story, let's back up to March 2020. I was diagnosed with polyhydramnios (too much amniotic fluid) and began being followed by a maternal fetal medicine doctor. It was recommended that I complete weekly biophysical profiles (BPP) to ensure all was well with the baby in utero. Micah passed each weekly BPP, so imagine the surprise of my doctor, his pediatrician and myself when he was diagnosed with EA-TEF shortly after his birth. We were rushed to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt in Nashville, Tennessee, soon after the diagnosis where we met with a team of specialists including a general surgeon who would perform an EA-TEF repair.

Micah underwent surgery at three days old. His medical team was unable to determine the severity of his EA-TEF prior to the surgical repair. Soon after Micah's surgery was complete, we met with his team again to discuss his next steps in which the team discussed their findings during the surgical procedure.

Thankfully, Micah was born with the most common type of EA (Type C) in which the proximal portion of his esophagus ended in a fistula and the distal portion was connected to his trachea. A relatively simple procedure to disconnect the connection between the esophagus and trachea was

completed and reconnected this distal portion of his esophagus with the proximal portion. After being in-patient in the NICU for nearly two weeks, Micah was cleared to be discharged from the hospital and home we went. Micah was sent home with instructions to schedule monthly appointments with his surgeon who completed the esophageal repair to monitor his recovery and progress with feeding and swallowing.

Once home, Micah faced a number of trials including: issues with gastroesophageal reflux, esophageal stricture, choking and food impaction as a result of esophageal dysmotility and esophageal dysphagia. At 10 months of age, Micah had a procedure to dilate his esophagus. Even after the dilation, from the time he was 10 months old to about 18 months old, Micah experienced episodes of choking and food impaction. One episode was so significant, he required an ER visit to dislodge the food. At one of Micah's monthly appointments with his surgeon, I brought up my concerns regarding Micah's choking and food impaction issues. His surgeon was apprehensive to refer him for feed therapy, even though Micah was struggling to eat meals like a typical 18-month-old. The surgeon reinforced that Micah would "figure it out" as he ate more solid foods. As a mom and an SLP, I didn't want to wait for my son to just "figure it out" nor did I want to be prepared to perform the Heimlich maneuver any time he ate solid foods. Finally, I had advocated loudly enough that his surgeon referred him for feeding therapy.

Micah officially began feeding therapy when he was 21 months old. At the time, Micah only drank from a bottle, only ate water thin puree or very soft, mashed foods. He was presented with one or two small pieces of soft, solid food at a time due to fear of choking. His SLP worked with him on chewing,

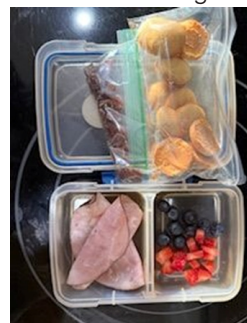


Micah's meal from 8/28/22 (26 months old)

getting rid of the bottle, experiencing different textures and a developed plan to get Micah to eat larger quantities of foods at a time. After almost three years in

feeding therapy, Micah was dismissed! He was FINALLY able to enjoy meals like a "typical" child. While he does still require specific feeding and swallowing procedures and trained adults monitoring him during meals, he is thriving during meal/snack time!

While Micah began his life with



Micah's meal from 2/27/2026

complicated circumstances, he is living his life with abundant joy and eating All. The. Foods. He is a bit mischievous and tries to sneak his not so safe foods (breads, sticky gummies, or bigger bites) while mom and dad aren't

looking. Advocacy led us down the path to some wonderful professionals. Not only did they help us to develop Micah's feeding and swallowing skills but they also encouraged us to push ourselves when we got comfortable



or complacent in trying different foods. Four years later and Micah has his buddy SLP (whom he still requests to call to chat with) and I developed a lifelong friend!



Alex Got His Mojo Back



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