

Occupational Therapy in Educational Settings Under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act



Skills for the Job of Living— Learning by *All* Students



Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants are part of the education team within a school district.

The profession of occupational therapy is concerned with a person's ability to participate in desired daily life activities or "occupations." In the schools, occupational therapists use their unique expertise to help children to be prepared for and perform important learning and school-related activities and to fulfill their role as students. In this setting, occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants support academic and non-academic outcomes including social skills, math, reading, writing, recess, participation in sports, self-help skills, prevocational/vocational participation and more, for children and students with disabilities, 3 to 21 years of age. They are particularly skilled in facilitating access to curricular and extra-curricular activities for all students through supports, design planning, and other methods. Additionally, they play a critical role in training parents, other staff members, and caregivers regarding educating students with diverse learning needs.



Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants bring specific knowledge and expertise to the education team to appropriately address student needs.

Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants know how to

- observe a student engaging in an activity and provide strategies to facilitate the student's full participation;
- reduce barriers that limit student participation within the school environment;
- utilize assistive technology to support student success;
- support the needs of students with significant challenges, such as by helping to determine methods for alternate assessment;
- help identify long-term goals for post-school outcomes; and
- help plan relevant instructional activities for ongoing implementation in the classroom.



Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants

work with a variety of individuals to address student needs.

Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants work with

- students to improve their performance in a variety of learning environments (e.g., playgrounds, classrooms, lunchrooms, bathrooms);
- parents to help them support their children’s learning and participation in school;
- educators and other school support staff to plan and develop activities and environments that include all students;
- paraeducators to support child success and promote safety within the school environment (e.g., physical and behavioral assistance needs); and
- administrators to provide training for students, staff, and parents, as well as to recommend equipment for schools and ways to modify existing buildings and curriculum to allow access for all.



Occupational therapy services

for students with special needs are determined through the IEP process.

School-based occupational therapy is available for students who are eligible for special education services. Occupational therapists complete assessments and work with other members of the school-based team to help determine what is needed for a student to receive a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. They collaborate with other members of the education team to identify a student’s annual goals and determine the services, supports, modifications, and accommodations that are required for the student to achieve these goals. When the IEP team determines that occupational therapy is needed for a student in order to meet his or her annual goals, then occupational therapy should be included in the student’s IEP.



Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants

address student needs in other ways.

Occupational therapy practitioners and school districts across the country are finding innovative and creative ways to integrate occupational therapy expertise across educational environments. This includes providing valuable services to meet the broader student and systemic needs beyond what is required under IDEA. These services include occupational therapists participating in pre-referral activities to address student behavior and learning needs, curriculum and program development, and school health and safety; identifying assessment accommodations required under the No Child Left Behind mandates; and developing violence prevention programs and others. Many schools utilize the occupational therapist’s knowledge and expertise to assist in developing curriculums such as handwriting and social skills. ■

Developed for AOTA by Leslie Jackson, MEd, OT, Yvonne Swinth, PhD, OTR/L, and Gloria Frolek Clark, MS, OTR/L, BCP

AOTA The American Occupational Therapy Association

4720 Montgomery Lane
Bethesda, MD 20814-3425
301-652-AOTA (2682)
www.aota.org

Occupational Therapy: Skills for the Job of Living

Copyright 2006 American Occupational Therapy Association. All rights reserved. This material may be printed and distributed without prior written consent.

