



**PARENT'S GUIDE
TO
OCCUPATIONAL AND
PHYSICAL THERAPY
SERVICES IN
MONTANA SCHOOLS**



2007



Parents Guide to Occupational and Physical Therapy Services in Montana Schools

INTRODUCTION

This document provides information for parents about the services of educational occupational therapists and physical therapists who deliver services in Montana public schools. For more information, check with your school district or contact Montana's Parent Training at Parents Let's Unite for Kids (PLUK), 516 North 32nd St. Billings, MT 59101. (406)255-0540 (Phone) (800)222-7585 (Montana only). (406)255-0523 (FAX) plukinfo@pluk.org, or the Montana Office of Public Instruction website at www.opi.mt.gov.

For ease of reference, the material is presented in a question and answer format and categorized under the following headings: **Eligibility, Referral and Evaluation, Related Services, Services, Individualized Education Program, and Procedural Safeguards.**

Occupational Therapy = OT
Physical Therapy = PT

ELIGIBILITY AND EVALUATION



1. What is the job of occupational and physical therapists in schools?

Physical and occupational therapy services in the public school setting will assist the student with disabilities to benefit from their special education program. Occupational therapy (OT) and physical therapy (PT) are “*related services*” which may be required to assist a “child with disabilities” to benefit from “special education.” These services are “educationally” related, not “medically” related.

2. What is the role of the OT and/or PT in my child’s program?

The school-based occupational or physical therapist supports the student’s ability to gain access to the general education curriculum in connection with their IEP and to function across all educational settings.

3. How does my child become eligible for OT and/or PT services?

Your child must first be eligible for special education services. If OT and/or PT benefit your child’s special education program, then services can be included on the IEP.

The determination of eligibility for occupational therapy and/or physical therapy service should be based upon a student’s educational needs required to benefit from their special education program.

Whether a student needs occupational therapy or physical therapy as a related service is an IEP team decision; you must be part of that process.

4. How might my child be referred for OT and/or PT services in school?

Occupational and physical therapy referrals shall be consistent with the policies and procedures of the school district. A request for initial evaluation shall include documentation from a school-based support team process and/or screening procedures. A parent can request an evaluation for school based OT and/or PT.

If screening procedures indicates that a referral to special education for evaluation is necessary, a written referral is made. You will be notified and parent consent for the initial evaluation will be obtained.

5. What is involved in an evaluation for possible OT and/or PT services?

Physical therapy and occupational therapy evaluations provide information of the student's functional capabilities for the school team to consider. The therapists' evaluations should describe the educational implications of the functional disability and list what therapy, accommodations/modifications of materials or environment are needed (seating, mobility aids, adapted physical education, etc.)

RELATED SERVICES



6. If my child is enrolled in a private school, can he or she still receive occupational or physical therapy as a related service?

Yes, if (1) district has identified occupational and/or physical therapy service(s) as one of the services it will provide to IDEA eligible private school students, (2) it is determined necessary in order for the student to benefit from special education and (3) it is identified as a service to be provided to the student in the student's Services Plan. The decision as to where the services will be provided is determined by the district.

SERVICES

7. Can a physical therapist or occupational therapist provide services to a student in the general education program who does not qualify under IDEA?

Physical therapy or occupational therapy may be provided as a related service to a qualified student under Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act. IDEA funds may not be used to provide such services to qualified Section 504 students unless the student also is eligible for services under IDEA. For more information regarding Section 504, please refer to the Montana Section 504 Guidelines, Accessibility for All.

8. Can a student who is IDEA-qualified receive services exclusively from an occupational therapist or physical therapist with no other special education service identified?

Occupational therapy and physical therapy are provided as a related service to assist the student who is IDEA-qualified to benefit from his or her special education. The child must first qualify for special education services.

9. Who may provide OT and PT services in schools?

Therapy may only be provided by an occupational therapist or certified occupational therapy assistant (COTA). Physical therapy services may only be provided by a physical therapist or physical therapy assistant (PTA). Evaluation, reevaluation, and intervention planning are the sole responsibility of the OT or PT. Routine service delivery may be provided by any of the above listed therapy practitioners in their area of licensure or certification. Ultimately, the responsibility for services provided lies with the OT or PT professional.

10. What is the difference between direct and indirect services?

- *Direct services* consist of individualized interventions that are designed and carried-out with the child individually or in a small group by an Occupational or Physical Therapist.
- *Consultation or indirect services* include a collaborative effort between the therapist and the teachers, paraprofessionals, parents, etc. All

professionals share the responsibility for identifying the problem as well as creating and altering possible solutions. The expertise lies within the therapist, but the program and techniques are carried out by the entire team.

11. What happens when a student moves into a new school district?

IDEA 2004 makes it very clear that students transferring between and within States continue to receive services comparable to the current IEP until an evaluation and eligibility determination can be completed.

12. Are private occupational and/or physical therapists allowed to practice their services in the school?

School districts will make the decision and follow their own policies. In practice, some school districts allow private service providers into their buildings. There must be collaboration between the IEP Team and private therapists regarding the services that will be provided.

It is up to the IEP team to identify the student's educational needs and write and implement the educationally based goals. It is, however, the parents' right to request that the school staff consider additional assessment information and to invite whomever they choose to the IEP meeting.

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM



13. Must the occupational therapist or physical therapist attend the IEP meetings?

It is not required that they attend. However, if a child with a disability has an identified need for related services, it would be appropriate for the related services personnel to attend the meeting or otherwise be involved in developing the IEP. The OT and/or PT will at times issue a written report for the IEP Team.

14. What is the role of OT and/or PT in IEP meetings?

The IEP team develops measurable annual educational and functional goals based on the student's educational needs. The OT and/or PT will provide input on how they will support these goals through OT and/or PT services.

15. Is there a separate section on the IEP for occupational therapy and physical therapy goals?

The IEP team will develop a set of annual goals. The student-specific goals are a result of a shared decision-making team process and professional collaboration. All OP/PT services must support one or more of the student's identified IEP goals.

16. What is the difference between an IEP and a 504 accommodation plan?

Both laws protect the educational rights of students with disabilities. Under IDEA 2004, the Individualized

Education Program (IEP) is implemented for those students who have been determined eligible and receive special education and related services. Section 504 provides accommodations, services, and protections for students who meet the criteria for substantially limiting a major life function but who do not need specially designed instruction.

17. What is the criterion for exiting (dismissing) a student from OT and PT services?

When determining whether to exit a child from services, it is important to discuss information about the child, including evaluations and information from parents, current classroom assessment and observations, and teacher and related service observations. The IEP team (including parents and child, if appropriate) determines whether therapy services will be discontinued. Of course, written notice and written parental consent are required before discontinuing any IEP service.

18. Is extended school year (ESY) provided in the OT and/or PT areas?

This is an annual determination of the IEP team. Every child with an IEP has the right to have ESY discussed as part of their IEP meeting. Extended school year services are provided for those students who demonstrate a regression in skill level over breaks (summer break, winter break, spring break). Skills that have been mastered might be lost during the course of a break, and recouping these skills takes a greater span of time than the span of the break.

REFERENCES

Montana Department of Education Guidelines for the Provision of Occupational and Physical Therapy Services, Montana Department of Education, March 2007

RESOURCES

- Your School District
- Parents Let`s Unite for Kids (PLUK)
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