

1 Who are school-based occupational therapy practitioners?

School-based occupational therapy practitioners are occupational therapists (OTs) and occupational therapy assistants (OTAs) who use meaningful activities (occupations) to help children and youth participate in what they need and/or want to do in order to promote physical and mental health and well-being. Occupational therapy addresses the physical, cognitive, psychosocial and sensory components of performance. In schools, occupational therapy practitioners focus on academics, play and leisure, social participation, self-care skills (ADLs or Activities of Daily Living), and transition/work skills. Occupational therapy's expertise includes activity and environmental analysis and modification with a goal of reducing the barriers to participation.



7 How do I find an occupational therapy practitioner?

To recruit an occupational therapy practitioner, contact your local college/university occupational therapy programs, state occupational therapy associations (<https://www.aota.org/Advocacy-Policy/State-Policy/State-OT-Associations.aspx>), or state licensure board. Consider posting the position on AOTA's OTJobLink at <http://www.otjoblink.org/>.

8 What are effective retention strategies for occupational therapy practitioners?

Some recruitment and retention strategies include offering professional development, mentoring opportunities, regular feedback on job performance, streamlined paperwork and time during the day for its completion, management support for practitioners and service delivery, electronic support for documentation and communication, teaming, and leadership opportunities. Refer to resources of the National Coalition on Personnel Shortages in Special Education & Related Services at www.specialedshortages.org. You may start a dialogue about workload issues with your staff by linking to the AOTA document "Transforming Caseload to Workload" at <http://www.aota.org/Practice/Children-Youth/Caseload-Workload.aspx>

9 Where do I go to learn more?

To learn more about occupational therapy please visit our Web site at www.aota.org. The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) is the professional society of occupational therapy, representing the interests of more than 140,000 occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, and students working in practice, science, education, and research.

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What is the Role of the School-Based Occupational Therapy Practitioner?



Questions & Answers for
School Administrators



2 What services do occupational therapy practitioners provide in schools?

Occupational therapy practitioners provide a continuum of service and support to students and personnel under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the reauthorization of ESEA, most recently enacted as The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, including:

- **Services for struggling learners in general education:**

Practitioners can contribute in an early intervening, multi-tiered approach (i.e., Response to Intervention) within general education. Occupational therapists can assist with periodic screenings/probes (including both data collection and analysis), provide teacher training, model activities to whole classrooms or small groups, and assist with team problem solving.

- **Services for individual students in special education:**

Evaluation services assist the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team with identifying the presence of a disability and whether there is an educational need for occupational therapy services. Occupational therapy intervention is provided directly “to the child, or on behalf of the child, and [as]...program modifications or supports for school personnel” (IDEA, 20 USC, Section 1414 (d)(1)(A) IV). This may include adapting the environment, modifying curriculum, supporting accommodations, ensuring access and participation in school activities and educational programs, and assisting in preparation for transition post-graduation. Services take place in natural school settings during the routines of the school day, and are most beneficial when

they occur at the location and time that the student is experiencing challenges. Services are designed to support progress on the student’s IEP.

Students who are not eligible for special education may receive occupational therapy services under a Section 504 plan. Services are designed to ensure students have equal access to all aspects of the school day and support student participation and success in general education.

- **Training and resources for school personnel and families:**

Practitioners can provide training in typical and atypical child development and the impact of physical and mental health on learning and participation at school. Training of school personnel in lifts and transfers can ensure student safety and prevent staff back injuries. Occupational therapy practitioners can contribute to universal design for learning (UDL), support the use of assistive technology, and provide information on positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) including bullying prevention.

- **Participating on collaborative teams:**

As members of IEP teams, technical assistance teams, problem-solving teams, and curriculum committees, practitioners bring their unique skills to aid students in accessing learning opportunities. They support student participation in school routines while promoting independence.

- **Partnering with districts:**

Occupational therapy practitioners focus on helping students achieve their academic and behavior outcomes which in turn improve school districts’ ability to meet state and national achievement standards (i.e., Common Core State Standards). Practitioners can help students prepare for future employment and life skills needed for community integration.

3 How are occupational therapy services funded?

Depending upon the purpose of the service, federal, state, and local funds are all sources for funding occupational therapy in public schools. In states that have pursued agreements with federal Medicaid programs, billing for the portion of occupational therapy services that is provided directly to the child on their IEP yields an additional source of funds.

4 What is the difference between an occupational therapist and occupational therapy assistant?

- **Occupational therapists** are autonomous practitioners, and are responsible for all aspects of occupational therapy service delivery including the safety and effectiveness of the service.
- **Occupational therapy assistants** must receive supervision from an occupational therapist to deliver occupational therapy services. Occupational therapy assistants deliver services under the supervision of, and in partnership with, occupational therapists.

5 How will I determine what is appropriate compensation for occupational therapy practitioners’ services?

Some resources for review include other school districts, local health care facilities, the AOTA Workforce and Compensation Report, and Bureau of Labor statistics.

6 How can I verify that the occupational therapist and occupational therapy assistant are appropriately licensed/credentialed?

Practitioners complete an accredited occupational therapy program, supervised fieldwork, and a national certification examination. These form the basis for state credentialing (usually licensure) of practitioners. You can request a copy of their current license and/or certification credentials.