

# Special Education OT/PT Services Tip

May 2022

During their [April 2022 board meeting](#), the Occupational Therapy Practice Board reviewed and discussed a correspondence request from an occupational therapy (OT) practitioner for the board to provide guidance regarding physical therapists (PT) and OTs providing services in a school setting. [OSPI recently became aware of the guidance](#) and would like to take this opportunity to support districts in understanding the guidance for evaluating and providing services to students who require physical therapy, occupational therapy, or both.

## **Question: How Can Occupational and Physical Therapists Collaborate on Evaluation Practices and IEP Services in the School Setting?**

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), OTs and PTs provide services when the student's disability interferes with the student's educational performance and ability to meet Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals, or needs OT and/or PT as a related service. While some student's needs are based on a medical condition, school-based therapy services may also address the student's educational needs and functional skills necessary to participate in the educational setting.

## **Evaluation Considerations**

The evaluation team should utilize assessments to determine a student's need for OT and PT services based on the domain and area deficits found across assessments.

If the evaluation team does not have enough information to determine whether OT and/or PT services are needed, then additional assessments may be necessary.

It is the evaluation team's role to determine who the most appropriate provider is to conduct and interpret assessments and ensure they are administered in accordance with testing protocols. ([WAC 392-172A-02020\(iv\)\(v\)](#))

## **IEP Service Considerations**

Occupational therapy services generally focus on areas of school related activities such as daily living, sensory processing, and self-care. ([RCW 18.59.020](#))

Physical therapy services generally focus on movement and mobility, i.e., activities such as standing, transferring, and muscle strengthening for tolerance and maintaining balance. ([RCW 18.74.010](#))

It is the IEP team's role to determine who the most appropriate provider is to design, deliver and monitor services – whether it is an OT, PT, or both.



While the functions of OTs and PTs can overlap, and some service delivery can be provided by either an OT or PT, districts need to ensure that students receive comprehensive evaluations when determining students' needs. In addition, Medicaid reimbursement provider guidelines include reimbursement for activities performed by either an OT or a PT. Lastly, each provider is expected to understand and uphold their profession's scope of practice and guidance regarding codes of ethics and standards of professional conduct. ([WAC 246-847-170](#)) ([WAC 246-915-180](#))

We hope this information will assist school districts and trust that districts' evaluation groups and IEP teams will work together to identify appropriate evaluations and services for students.