



Physical Therapy in School Settings

Physical therapy (PT) is one of the related services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and is provided to support the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students ages 3-21, who have a disability that interferes with their educational performance and ability to benefit from their education program. When the student's IEP identifies PT as a needed resource, physical therapists will be integrated as members of a multidisciplinary school team. Using their unique expertise in movement and function, PTs ensure a free and appropriate education for students with disabilities to prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living. The school-based PT promotes motor development and the student's participation in everyday routines and activities that are a part of his or her program.

The PT designs and performs therapeutic interventions, including compensation, remediation and prevention strategies and adaptations, focusing on functional mobility and safe, efficient access and participation in educational activities and routines in natural learning environments.

Specific roles and responsibilities include:

- Participating in the IEP/504 process, including collaboratively determining the need for physical therapy as a related service under IDEA or as a reasonable accommodation under Section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA);
- Gathering appropriate information from students, parents, and other team members regarding the child's functional motor performance in school settings;
- Selecting, administering, and interpreting a variety of screening instruments and standardized measurement tools;
- Collaboratively with students' IEP teams, examining and evaluating eligible students' strengths and needs to establish their ability to participate in meaningful school activities and routines with or without assistance;
- Designing and implementing physical therapy interventions that allow students to benefit from their educational program;
- Measuring and documenting student progress resulting from the designed physical therapy interventions;
- Teaching and training family members and educational personnel in an effort to help the student achieve his or her IEP goals;
- Functioning as a consultant to other school personnel, parents, and students to coordinate the delivery of physical therapy services, which may include:
 - Interpretation of assessments and recommendations;
 - Explanation of the potential impact of developmental, medical and/or sensorimotor impairments on educational performance;
 - Instruction of other caregivers regarding the physical management of students, such as safe lifting, positioning, assisted ambulation, gross motor programs, vocational tasks, leisure activities, and/or equipment use;
 - Setting realistic expectations for student performance in school; and

- Selecting, modifying, or customizing adaptive equipment and assistive technology.
- Forming partnerships and working with other team members in the school setting to promote an effective physical therapy plan of care;
- Coordinating physical therapy interventions within the student's educational program;
- Adapting environments to facilitate student access and participation in the educational program;
- Educating school personnel and families to promote inclusion of students within the educational setting by developing, demonstrating, training, and monitoring the effectiveness of strategies and intervention activities, and subsequently using gathered data to make program modification decisions. This includes the use of assistive technology for access and participation in the general education curriculum;
- Supporting the safe transportation of students;
- Referring students to other related service personnel and to healthcare providers as appropriate; and
- Serving as a liaison among school, medical personnel, and medical equipment vendors;

Physical Therapists are integral members of the school-based teams that ensure a free and appropriate education for students with disabilities and prepare them for further education, employment and independent living.

For any questions or for additional information, please contact Stephanie Katz, Senior Congressional Affairs Specialist, at stephaniekatz@apta.org or (703) 706-3156.

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