

Physical Therapy in School Settings

Physical therapy is one of the related services under Part B of IDEA and is provided to support the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Physical therapists are members of a multidisciplinary school team that ensures a free and appropriate education for students with disabilities to prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living. Using their unique expertise in movement and function, particularly related to the neuromuscular and musculoskeletal systems. The school-based physical therapist promotes motor development and the student's participation in everyday routines and activities that are part of the educational program.

The physical therapist performs therapeutic interventions, including compensation, remediation and prevention strategies and adaptations, focusing on functional mobility and safe, efficient access and participation in activities and routines in natural learning environments. Specific roles and responsibilities include:

- 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;
- Examining and evaluating eligible students' strengths and needs to establish their ability to participate in meaningful school activities and routines with or without assistance;
- Participating in team meetings, including parent conferences;
- Participating in the IEP/504 process, including collaboratively determining the need for physical therapy as a related service (IDEA) or as a reasonable accommodation (504);
- 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 school program;
- Adapting environments to facilitate student access and participation in the educational program;
- 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 problems on school performance;
 - instruction of other caregivers in the physical management of students, such as safe lifting, positioning, assisted ambulation, gross motor programs, vocational tasks, leisure activities, and/or equipment use; and
 - setting realistic expectations for student performance in school;
 - selecting, modifying, or customizing adaptive equipment and assistive technology.
- Educating school personnel and families to promote inclusion of students within the educational experience by developing, demonstrating, training, and monitoring the effectiveness of strategies and intervention activities, using data to make 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;
- Serving as a liaison among school, medical personnel, and medical equipment vendors;

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For any questions or additional information, please contact Monica Herr, Senior Congressional Affairs Specialist, at monicaherr@apta.org or 703-706-3156, or Deborah Crandall, Senior Regulatory Affairs Specialist, at deborahcrandall@apta.org or 703-706-3177.