



Understanding School-Based Occupational Therapy (OT)

What Is School-Based Occupational Therapy?

School-based occupational therapy (OT) helps students participate successfully in their school day. This includes academic tasks (such as writing or using technology), daily school routines (like managing materials or transitions between classes), and social participation (such as interacting with peers at lunch or on the playground).¹

Occupational therapy practitioners (OTPs) use meaningful activities, called *occupations*, to help students do the things they need and want to do at school. OT supports physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and sensory skills so students can access their education and fully participate in learning.²

OTPs support students with a wide range of learning styles, strengths, and support needs, including students with ADHD, Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Dyscalculia, and challenges with coordination or executive functioning.

Service Delivery

OT services may be provided in the classroom, termed “push-in,” in a 1:1 environment with a therapist, termed “pull,” or in a small group environment with a therapist and one or more other students. OTPs collaborate with families, the student, and the student’s team (teachers, other staff as applicable) to develop individualized goals specific to the school environment.³

OTPs may support students with:

Learning & Organization

- Understanding personal strengths and challenges
- Developing attention, memory, and focus skills⁴
- Strengthening executive functioning skills (planning, completing work, turning in assignments on time)⁴
- Using strategies to support the writing process

Daily School Routines

- Managing transitions between activities and settings⁴
- Organizing desks, lockers, and backpacks⁴
- Using school tools and materials (pencils, scissors, computers, assistive technology)⁴

- Following classroom routines and expectations⁴

Social & Emotional Skills

- Interacting with classmates and teachers⁴
- Managing stress, emotions, and behavior⁴
- Building self-advocacy skills and planning for the future⁴

Participation in School Activities

- Navigating the playground, cafeteria, and bus⁴
- Managing clothing fasteners (zippers, buttons, shoelaces)

Contact

If you're interested in learning if OT services might be helpful for your child at AIM, please contact supportservices@aimpa.org.

Sources

1. American Occupational Therapy Association. Occupational therapy practice framework: Domain and process (4th ed.). *Am J Occup Ther*. 2020;74(Suppl 2):7412410010. doi:10.5014/ajot.2020.74S2001
2. American Occupational Therapy Association. *School-based occupational therapy: A guide for administrators*. Accessed January 2026.
3. American Occupational Therapy Association. *Joint statement on interprofessional collaborative goals in school-based practice*. Accessed January 2026.
4. Cahill SM, Beisbier S. Occupational therapy practice guidelines for school-based interventions. *Am J Occup Ther*. 2020;74(2):7402180030p1–7402180030p38. doi:10.5014/ajot.2020.742003