

How the IEP Team Decides if School-Based Services Are Needed

Step 1: IEP Goals Come First

Before deciding if a student needs physical therapy at school, the **IEP team**—including parents, teachers, therapists, and the student (when appropriate)—develops the student’s goals.

Key Points:

- Goals are **not assigned to a specific professional** (e.g. PT, OT)
- Goals focus on what the student needs to **learn or improve in school**
- Services are chosen **after goals are written**

The team then determines which supports—including occupational and physical therapy—are needed to help the student succeed.

Four Questions the IEP Team Must Answer

1. Is the disability impacting school participation?

- Is it affecting the student’s learning, mobility, or access to school activities?

2. Is the need educational (not just medical)?

- A diagnosis alone does **not** qualify a student for school PT
- Services must support **school success and participation**

3. Will PT help the student meet their IEP goals?

- The physical therapist looks at your child’s condition, school routines, motivation, and support at home.
- PT is only included if it’s likely to help your child make meaningful progress in school.

4. Is a physical therapist the only one who can help with this goal?

- Could the IEP goal be addressed appropriately or effectively by the classroom or special education teacher or other school staff?
- Do environmental modifications and other school-based accommodations effectively address the student’s access and participation needs?

Physical Therapy is added to a student's services only if:

- A PT's **specialized skills are necessary**, and
 - The goal cannot be effectively addressed by others
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The difference between School-based Physical Therapy & Medical Physical Therapy

- A child may have a medical need for therapy, but **not all therapy qualifies for school-based services**.
- School-based PT must support the student's **education**, not just a medical condition.

When a Student *Would Not* Qualify for School-Based PT

A student **would not** qualify for school-based PT for a medical condition if:

- The condition **does not impact their ability to access or participate in school activities**.
- The PT services are **primarily medical in nature** and **not tied to educational goals**.
- The student's needs can be addressed through **medical PT alone**, without requiring school-based intervention.
- The student does **not have an IEP or 504 Plan**, and their educational performance is not affected.

Example: A student is recovering from a sports injury and receives outpatient PT. If they can still access school buildings, participate in class, and perform school tasks without support, they **would not** receive school-based PT—even though they have a medical need.

Bottom Line

- School-based physical therapy is provided **only when it supports access and participation in education**.
- Decisions are **team-based and goal-driven**.