

Definition of Occupational Therapy

An occupational therapist is a trained health professional that uses purposeful, goal directed activities and task analysis to enable a child with a disability to benefit from their individualized education program (IEP). Federal law mandates that occupational therapy (OT) in the school system be educationally relevant. The focus of OT services in a school setting is to promote functional independence or participation within the educational environment. Educational OT services are those services developed by educational personnel and the family and authorized in a student's IEP. OT services may be delivered directly to the child, on behalf of the child (consultation with parents and teachers) or through modifications and support for school personnel that will be provided for the child (in-service training). The IEP team may determine that the student does not require occupational therapy through the educational program. OT services are not intended to satisfy the medical needs of a student and therefore may not meet the total therapy needs of the student. However, the student's family may wish to pursue therapy services outside the educational setting.

The federal definition of occupational therapy as a related service means services provided by a qualified occupational therapist; and includes-

- Improving, developing or restoring functions impaired or lost through illness, injury, or deprivation;
- Improving ability to perform tasks for independent functioning if functions are impaired or lost; and
- Preventing through early intervention, initial or further impairment or loss of function. [34 CFR 300.24(b) (5)]

Occupational Therapy services are provided differently under Part B and Part C of IDEA

Qualifications of a School Occupational Therapist

To work as an occupational therapist in Colorado's public schools, you must (a) maintain current certification by the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT), (b) be licensed as an occupational therapist with the Department of Regulatory Agencies (DORA), and (c) have a Special Services License through the Colorado Department of Education (CDE).

Responsibilities of a School Occupational Therapist

In a school setting the OT may be involved by facilitating any or all of the following areas that may interfere with a child's educational performance:

- self-help skills (feeding, dressing, hygiene)
- fine, gross and visual motor skills
- sensory processing and visual processing skills
- positioning, functional mobility and transitions
- functional communication through alternative methods
- adaptive devices/equipment & using educational tools/toys