

Providing Physical Therapy in Schools Under IDEA

Physical Therapy and IDEA

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, PL 105-17) is a federal law, with state education agency oversight, that supports the provision of public education for all children—regardless of the nature or severity of their disability. Part B of IDEA mandates the education of children, 3-21 years old, who have a disability that interferes with their educational performance and their ability to benefit from their educational program.

IDEA Implementation

- Implementation of IDEA Part B is the responsibility of each local education agency or school district.
- Children with disabilities are entitled to a free, appropriate public education.
- Special education and related services are provided, as necessary, to meet the unique needs of each child.
- "Special education" means specialized instruction linked to a measurable annual goal.
- Special education and related services are to be provided in the least restrictive environment.
- IDEA, in conjunction with such other legislative mandates as the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act, provides appropriate school-based services for children.

Physical Therapy: A Related Service

- Physical therapy is one of the related services under Part B of IDEA.
- Physical therapy is provided to support the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- Physical therapists work collaboratively with a student's IEP team and participate in screening, evaluation, program planning, and intervention.
- As a member of the IEP team, physical therapists design and implement physical therapy interventions, including teaching and training of family and education personnel, to help the student achieve his/her IEP goal.
- Physical therapists assist students in accessing school environments and benefiting from their educational program.
- Physical therapists may be hired through the school district, an intermediate unit, or a contract with an outside agency or private practice.

IDEA Process

- The IEP is a process of planning and decision-making that becomes a written document for each student.
- Parents are an integral part of the IDEA process and must be notified of their rights, including the right to due process.
- IDEA defines the components of the process, including referral, evaluation, eligibility determination for special education, creation of measurable goals, and identification of services needed to meet a student's goals.

The IEP Team

- The IEP team is multi-disciplinary and includes the parent (or family) and, when indicated, the physical therapist and student.
- The team identifies the student's needs and sets measurable goals.
- The team identifies the resources, including physical therapy, needed to meet a goal.
- The team determines the frequency and duration, location, and specific criteria of the physical therapy service.

Funding for Physical Therapy

- Under IDEA, special education and related services must be provided at no cost to the parent (or family).
- Local education agencies (school districts) may access other funding sources.

- A primary source of alternative funding is Medicaid; reimbursement procedures and policies are individually set by each state.
- Third-party funding that requires co-payments, decreases the lifetime maximum amount, or results in the loss of other services cannot be accessed without voluntary informed parental (or familial) permission.

Licensure and Practice

- Each state has laws governing the licensure and practice of physical therapy.
- State education agencies also may require additional certification for employees working in schools.
- In states that do not have direct access laws, physical therapists will be required to obtain a prescription from the child's physician prior to the evaluation and/or intervention.

IDEA Resources

PTs working in schools must be aware of many legislative and regulatory provisions related to IDEA. APTA's Section on Pediatrics recommends the following resources for further information:

McEwen IR. *Providing Physical Therapy Services Under Parts B & C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. Alexandria, VA: Section on Pediatrics, American Physical Therapy Association; 2000.

David KS, McEwen IR. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: roles of physical therapists in educational environments. In: *Topics in Physical Therapy - Pediatrics: Lesson 3*. Alexandria, VA: American Physical Therapy Association; 2001.

Effgen SK. The educational environment. In: Campbell SK (ed). *Physical Therapy for Children*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: WB Saunders Co; 2000:910-933.

Rapport MJ. Laws that shape therapy services in educational environments. *Physical & Occupational Therapy in Pediatrics*. 1995;2:5-32.

Office of Special Education Programs at www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP

IDEA Practices at www.ideapractices.org

For More Information

If you have additional questions, would like to order additional copies of this brochure, or would like to join the Section on Pediatrics, please contact the Executive Office of the Section on Pediatrics of the American Physical Therapy Association at:

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