OCCUPATIONAL / PHYSICAL THERAPY IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

An occupational and physical therapist is a trained health care professional that uses purposeful, goal directed activities and task analysis to enable children with a disability to benefit from their individualized education programs (IEP’s). Federal law mandates that occupational therapy (OT) and physical therapy (PT) in the school system be **educationally relevant**. In the school setting, Occupational and Physical therapy is a “related service” to special education under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Act. This means **that services must enhance or support educational goals as stated on the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP)**.

**Occupational Therapists** in the school setting look at certain skills which may interfere with a child’s educational performance:

- Neuromuscular - Range of Motion, Strength, Postural Control, Shoulder Stability
- Sensory Processing – Vestibular (movement), Tactile (touch), proprioception (joint sense), Ocular motor skills (eye muscle movements)
- Motor Behavior -Motor planning (ability to plan and perform movements) and Bilateral Coordination Skills (using two hand together)
- Fine-motor development
- Handwriting
- Visual motor (non-motor) and perceptual motor (motor) skills
- Self-help Skills
- Pre-Vocational Skills

**Physical Therapists** in the school setting look at certain skills which may interfere with a child’s educational performance:

- Neuromuscular- Range of motion, Strength, Postural Control, Shoulder stability, Joint ligamentous stability
- Sensory Processing – Vestibular (movement), Tactile (touch), proprioception (joint sense), visual-ocular reflex, muscle-force generation
- Motor Behavior- Motor planning (ability to plan and perform movements) and Bilateral Coordination Skills (using two hands and feet together)
- Gross-motor development
- Developmental transitions and negotiate school environment
- Health and Prevention screenings (scoliosis, orthopedic concerns…)
- Adaptive equipment needs (wheelchair, orthotics, helmets…)
- Health and wellness programs

These areas can be addressed through a variety of intervention strategies, which may include direct therapy with the child, consultation with the teacher, modification of the environment, provision of adaptive equipment, and staff training.