

What is the Purpose of Physical Therapy

What is School Physical Therapy (PT) Service?

Physical Therapy is a related service under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Related services are provided to help a child with an educational disability benefit from his/her special education program in the least restrictive learning environment. PTs address performance skills where a child's disability impacts or compromises their ability to access, participate, and/or to make progress in their natural learning environments. These services to students, school teams, and families may include:

- Recommending strategies, modifications, and adaptive aids in order to improve school performance, and to include disabled students in school activities.
- Developing activities to improve large muscle control and balance, to promote sensorimotor development (body awareness, postural control), and/or to promote independence in functional mobility skills.

How is Eligibility for Physical Therapy Services Determined?

To be eligible for school PT services, students must be identified as having a disability that interferes with education under the criteria of IDEA. The school team, which includes the parents/caregiver, establishes the child's present levels of performance and develops an individual education plan (IEP). Eligibility for PT services, is not based on specific test scores or discrepancies, rather on whether the unique expertise of the therapist is required for the student's educational participation. Some students, while not eligible for special education services, may qualify under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The 504 Plan specifies the accommodations that are necessary for a student to access educational activities and may involve input from a PT.

How Are Services Delivered?

Physical therapy may be service to a school team on behalf of a student, to help school personnel and parents work more effectively and efficiently with the student. It may include:

- Explaining how a student's medical, sensorimotor, or developmental problem will affect his school performance.
- Suggesting modifications to school activities and the school environment.
- Adapting positioning equipment for use in school.
- Instructing in the use and care of adapted and assistive devices.
- Developing, demonstrating, and monitoring the effectiveness of therapeutic activities carried out by school personnel.

Physical Therapy may also be service directly to a student, whether individually or in a group. It is used when the intervention activities require the expertise of a PT. It may include:

- Implementing therapeutic activities to support a student's educational program when PT expertise is required for safety or effectiveness.
- Exploration of seating and positioning adaptations that will increase independence or participation in school activities.
- Training school staff in skills required for the physical management of the student, including specific handling techniques or helping a student to use special equipment.
- Exploring individualized modifications to school activities or the environment (ex. using special equipment to move around the school).

- Ongoing reassessment of the student's needs and the role of the PT in meeting those needs. Strategies and interventions are embedded where possible into naturally occurring activities and routines within the educational program.

Who Provides School PT Service?

- School PT service is provided by Maryland licensed physical therapists and Maryland licensed physical therapy assistants. They have passed national board examinations and are “highly qualified” professionals.
- PT's and PTA's are part of the interdisciplinary team that plans and monitors the student's special education Individual Education Program or written 504 Plan.

When are Services Discontinued?

Discontinuing services is warranted when the IEP/504 team determines that the child no longer requires the unique expertise of the physical therapist to achieve educational benefit. Factors in this decision include:

- Child has met the functional goals
- Deficits are no longer interfering with the child's ability to function within his/her educational program
- Strategies can be implemented by the current educational team
- Equipment and environmental modifications are in place and are effective
- Level of participation is within expectation for the child's educational program

Source: Baltimore County Public Schools (http://www.bcps.org/offices/special_ed/pt.html)