

FACT SHEET

Providing Physical Therapy Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA - Part B): An Overview of School-Based Physical Therapy

INTRODUCTION

This fact sheet provides an overview of the role of school based physical therapy within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B. The primary purpose of IDEA (Part B) is “to ensure that children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.”¹

IDEA is a federal law, with state education agency oversight, that ensures public education and early intervention services for all children, regardless of the nature or severity of their disability. IDEA is composed of four sections:²

- Part A: General provisions of the law
- Part B: Laws mandating education of children and youth (3 to 21 years old) who have a disability that impedes their educational performance and ability to benefit from their educational program.
- Part C: Laws for providing early intervening services for children (birth to 3rd birthday) with disabilities
- Part D: National activities to improve education of children with disabilities - grants, technology assistance & training

IMPLEMENTATION OF IDEA, PART B – SCHOOL-BASED SERVICES

- Individual student’s needs are determined using student data and evaluation(s).
- Parents/guardians are integral participants in the evaluative process and collaborate on the development of the Individualized Educational Program (IEP) as part of the IEP team.
- Parents/guardians must provide consent for evaluation and services and have rights to due process in the event consensus cannot be reached by the team.^{5,6}
- Specially designed instruction (SDI) and related services are individualized, linked to measurable student goal(s), and applied as documented in each student’s IEP.³
- IDEA requires coordinated services to address the transition from Part C to Part B,⁷ and from public school to work, further education and/or community engagement following school.⁸
- IDEA, the Americans with Disabilities Act,⁹ Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act,¹⁰ and the Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act provide a range of services to support students who require them for equal access to education.¹¹

THE IEP TEAM

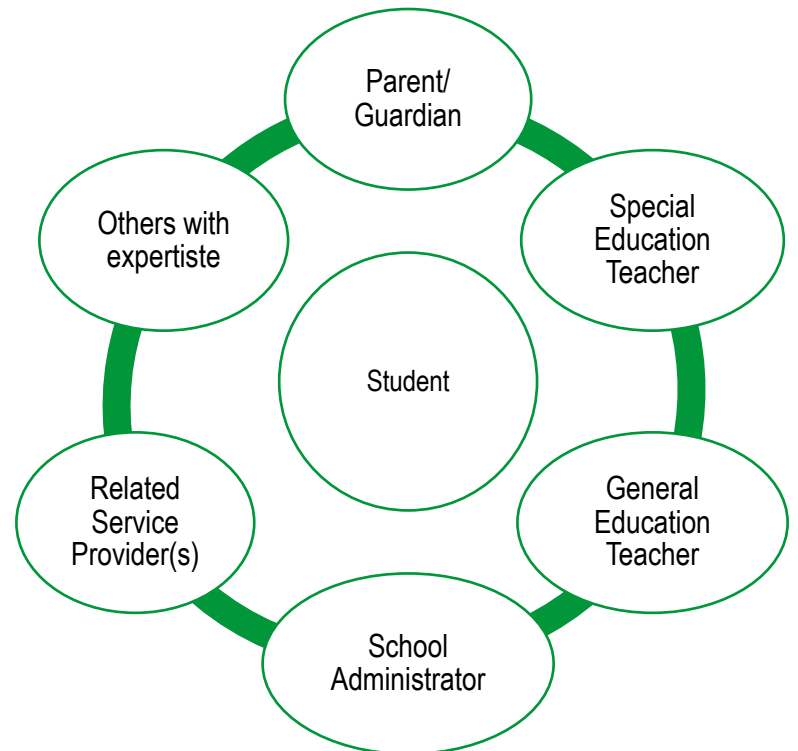
The IEP team includes the student, parent(s)/legal guardian, special and general education teachers, and a representative of the Local Education Agency (LEA). Additional qualified professionals, such as related service providers, or other individuals with special expertise related to the student may also be included on the team, depending on the needs of the student (see FIGURE 1). The IEP team relies upon student data to come to consensus for decisions regarding the student’s educational program.¹²

THE IEP PROCESS⁵

The IEP is the result of a dynamic process of data collection, review, and decision-making that results in a legal document which clearly describes the educational program (SDI, related, and supplemental services) for each student. Evaluation, IEP development, and updates are driven by each student's unique educational needs, current context, and student performance data (see FIGURE 2).

- **Referrals** can be made by school personnel or parent/legal guardian any time a student is suspected of having a disability and may be in need of special education services.
- **Evaluation** areas of concern are decided by consensus of the IEP team.
 - Evaluations are completed within a designated time frame, according to federal and state policy.
 - Educational priorities, needs, and goal areas are determined by the IEP team from the evaluation results and student data.
 - Comprehensive re-evaluation of each student should be conducted at least every 3 years or whenever additional data or assessment is required to develop or modify a student's educational program.
- **Eligibility** for special education and related services is determined by the IEP team in accordance with each state's special education policy and should include
 - Performance data from each student across multiple educational contexts/settings
 - Input from the student and parent
 - Recommendation by evaluators and practitioners
 - Specific criterion, if established by state special education policy
- **The IEP Team** collaboratively develops and documents as part of each student's IEP:
 - Measurable goals and objectives based on educational priorities and student data
 - Identified and required SDI, supplementary aids, supports, and related services to meet the established educational goal(s), which may include school-based physical therapy
 - The appropriate frequency, duration, location (with individual assessment of the least restrictive environment), and criteria for services
- **Provision of Specially Designed Instruction, Supplemental and Related Services:**⁹
 - Adapting all aspects of the program as required to ensure each student can make "progress appropriate in light of the child's unique circumstances."¹³
 - Monitoring progress and making revisions as necessary

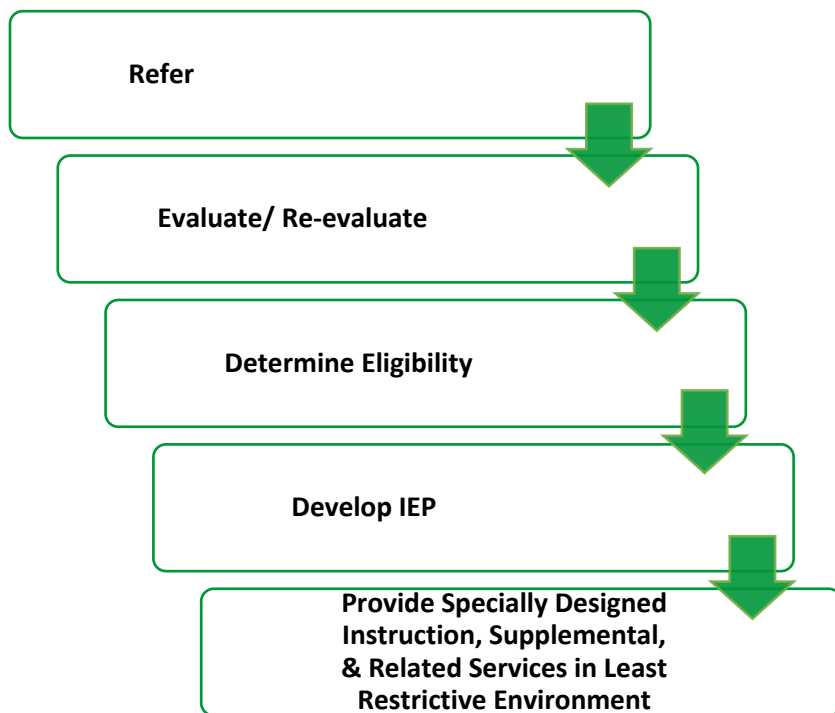
FIGURE 1: The IEP Team



SCHOOL-BASED PHYSICAL THERAPY

- Physical therapy is one of the related services under Part B of IDEA.¹⁴
- A student can receive school-based physical therapy when eligible for special education if needed to attain student goal(s) and PT expertise is required.
- Physical therapy provides services to and on behalf of students to address educational needs as part of the IEP
- Physical therapists work collaboratively with a student's IEP team and participate in screening, evaluation/reevaluation, program planning, goal development, transition, providing intervention, and collecting data to monitor progress.
- In response to the IEP, physical therapists design a plan of care (or intervention plan) and implement physical therapy interventions—including teaching, training, and support of family and education personnel, and documentation of progress—to help the student achieve their IEP goal(s).
- Physical therapy providers deliver services to support students in accessing and participating with peers in their educational environments.
- Physical therapy providers determine needs for appropriate assistive technology, supplementary aids, accommodations, and strategies to promote practice, participation, motor development, access, self-determination, and safety as related to their school day.¹⁵
- Physical therapy services are provided using a variety of delivery models across a service continuum from one-to-one intervention to consultation in support of the student's least restrictive environment.
- Physical therapy providers may be hired through the local education agency (LEA) through private providers or agencies, or contracted directly.
- Physical therapy providers should understand their discipline specific roles and responsibilities, policies of LEAs, state and federal educational agencies, and laws impacting services for students with disabilities.

FIGURE 2: Key Aspects of an IEP Process



LICENSURE AND PRACTICE

- Each state has laws governing physical therapy licensure and the practice of physical therapy. Most states do not include anything specific about school-based practice.
- Physical therapy providers must follow educational law and state therapy practice act regulations.
- State education agencies and LEAs may require additional certification for employees working in schools.
- Some states offer union membership as part of employee benefits.
- Physical therapy providers must adhere to the APTA's Code of Ethics (Physical Therapists) or Ethical Standards (Physical Therapist Assistants).¹⁶

FUNDING

- Special education and related services must be provided at no cost to the parent (or family).¹⁷
- States (LEAs) are directed to access reimbursement from Medicaid (or other sources) to aid in covering costs associated with provision of school-based health and related services required by IDEA, when provided to Medicaid-enrolled students. Medicaid funding should be used prior to any educational funding according to IDEA.¹⁸
- The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act requires a one-time consent for any release of personally identifiable information, which is needed to gain reimbursement from Medicaid.^{19,20}
- Accessing these funds cannot impact eligibility or incur cost, of any kind, for the student or family in other treatment settings²¹

SUMMARY

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), physical therapy is considered a related service. Intervention in the education setting is not provided to remediate medical diagnoses and or physical impairments under IDEA, but instead to help the student achieve his/her learning and participation goals despite the existing diagnosis driven impairments.. Schools are responsible only for those services necessary for the student to make progress in his/her special education program. Discontinuation of related services may occur when skills needed have been incorporated into school routines, when needed supports are in place without the addition of services or when the student no longer needs related service support to progress on goals/objectives.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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