

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE
HEARING ON
NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND: Ensuring High Academic Achievement for Limited
English Proficient Students and Students with Disabilities
July 12, 2006**

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The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) submits this statement for the record of the July 12, 2006 hearing. We appreciate the opportunity to provide this information regarding the relationship of occupational therapy services to improving results for children with disabilities and limited English proficiency under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Of concern to all educational stakeholders is how to best educate all students and how to appropriately measure student progress, particularly for students with disabilities and those with limited English proficiency. NCLB and IDEA are expected to work in concert to help schools meet the learning and behavioral needs of children with disabilities and other challenges like limited English proficiency. Occupational therapy services can play an important role in this effort.

Occupational Therapy Services under IDEA and NCLB

Occupational therapy is concerned with an individual's ability to do everyday activities, or *occupations*, so that they can participate fully in school, at home, and in the community. Occupational therapy practitioners use purposeful activities as therapy to help children bridge the gap between their capacity to learn and full, successful participation in education, work, and play.

Occupational therapy for the school-aged child is intended to help them succeed in school. Intervention strategies focus on information-processing, academic skill development, social interactions and the ability to function in the school environment. For adolescents, occupational therapy focuses on preparation for work, life choices, improvement of social and work skills, and learning how to create or alter the environment to maximize productivity.

How Occupational Therapy Helps Support NCLB and IDEA

Occupational therapy intervention for children and youth is planned in consultation with parents and families, teachers, and other professionals, and is directed toward achieving desired educational outcomes. Depending on the student's age, the presence of any learning difficulties may have debilitating effects on his or her sense of accomplishment or social competence. Occupational therapy intervention for these students can address these stresses by identifying psychosocial problems and appropriate strength based coping strategies.

In addressing learning problems, occupational therapists identify the underlying performance skills, including motor, process, communication and interaction skills that impede the student's ability to participate in learning and other school-related activities. The therapist also works with classroom teachers and the student's family to determine how to support the student's emerging skills.

Occupational therapy can have a significant supportive role in testing under NCLB. The occupational therapists' expertise can help teachers and IEP Teams to identify appropriate accommodations needed to support the student's skill level. This includes identification of and training in the use of assistive technology or other aids that will help the student to more successfully participate in state and district assessments. These strategies can be effective for both students with disabilities and limited English proficiency.

Another way in which occupational therapy improves student results is related to reading and handwriting. Occupational therapy has unique expertise in the areas that affect reading and writing. Children with handwriting and visual-perception difficulties often find a way to not perform or complete reading and written assignments. Occupational therapy is an important service that can help meet the needs of children with reading and writing difficulties.

AOTA believes that occupational therapy is an underutilized service that can meet and address children's learning, social and behavioral needs. This limited access affects both IDEA-eligible students as well as students in general education. Often this limitation is due to a lack of understanding about how occupational therapy can help or because of perceptions that therapists only address "motor" issues. Occupational therapy can be invaluable in helping parents and school staff to understand the relationship between the physical and psychosocial and how these factors support or impede children's progress.

Again, we thank you for the opportunity to comment on the important issue raised by this hearing and look forward to continue working with the Committee to improve Public Education for all Americans.