

August 15, 2017

Dear State Superintendent of Education and/or State Director of Special Education:

The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) is the national professional association representing the interests of more than 213,000 occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, and students of occupational therapy. The practice of occupational therapy is science-driven, evidence-based, and enables people of all ages to live life to its fullest by promoting health and addressing the functional effects of illness, injury, and disability.

AOTA is interested in enabling practitioners who are experienced and committed to school-based practice to move up the career ladder in educational systems. Occupational therapy practitioners are a part of most schools' teams. Many practitioners are full-time school employees serving children with disabilities and other students and are contributing to schoolwide programs to promote optimum success and achievement as well. School leadership positions, however, are often not accessible to occupational therapy practitioners because of state rules regarding educator or other status.

AOTA asserts that moving occupational therapy practitioners into school leadership positions will add value to students, to teams, and to schools. Because we have been told of the existence in some states of administrative barriers for occupational therapy practitioners to move into leadership positions, we are writing to urge each state department of education to evaluate the criteria for moving into school leadership positions. In many states, an individual must be licensed by the state education authority (often a teaching license) to be considered for a leadership role. Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants are licensed in all states for their profession but do not obtain an education license. We are urging states to review their criteria to consider how to include licensed occupational therapy practitioners among the professionals who are eligible for school administrative/leadership certification.

Occupational therapy practitioners regularly assume administrator roles in hospitals and clinics; they have great potential to apply their expertise to school administrative positions as well. Their knowledge and skills in mental health position them well to address personnel issues, to support parents, and to promote social emotional learning. Their knowledge and training in transition can help to improve graduation rates, to improve attendance, and to reduce dropout rates. The occupational therapy perspective adds value for meeting local, state, and federal accountability outcome measures.

The school leadership role is an increasingly important position in educational settings to address the complex physical, cognitive, social and mental health issues that impact learning and academic achievement. Strong school leaders provide vision and synchronization for inter-professional, team-based program development and services.

Occupational therapy practitioners from their professional roots, philosophy and education, have much to contribute as school leaders. Across the country, there are occupational therapy practitioners serving in school leadership or administrator roles; however, as noted above, in some states, barriers exist that prohibit some individuals from taking on such positions. Recognizing and supporting occupational therapy practitioners who want to pursue leadership status can help to assure a full complement of disciplines serve as school leaders.

AOTA encourages state education boards and agencies to address barriers and create opportunities for occupational therapy practitioners. We encourage broadening the eligibility criteria to recognize the existing leadership skills and potential of occupational therapy practitioners in this capacity.

Suggested actions include:

1. Recognize that school leadership positions are within the occupational therapy scope of practice.
2. Broaden the requirements for leadership positions and recognize occupational therapy licensure as a valid component of moving into these positions.
3. Establish or modify existing administrator leadership pathways to include opportunities for occupational therapy practitioners.

AOTA welcomes the opportunity to partner with state boards and state departments of education to encourage occupational therapy practitioners to bring their capacities forward to benefit all school systems in administrative and in other leadership roles.

For further assistance in this matter, please contact Sandra Schefkind ([sschefkind@aota.org](mailto:sschefkind@aota.org) or 240-482-4177) in the AOTA's Professional Affairs Division.

Sincerely,



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