

North Carolina School-Based Occupational Therapist Standards

The North Carolina Professional School-Based Occupational Therapist Standards are the basis for preparation, evaluation, and professional development for school-based occupational therapists. Colleges and universities are encouraged to align with these standards, a new evaluation instrument has been created, and professional development will occur to ensure growth based on these standards. These will describe the skills and knowledge needed for 21st Century intervention and learning.

Vision for School-Based Occupational Therapists

The demands of 21st Century education dictate new roles for school-based occupational therapists who provide a wide variety of services that help students succeed academically, functionally, socially, and emotionally. In collaboration with educators, parents/guardians, and other school professionals, school-based occupational therapists strive not only to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments for all students, but also to strengthen connections between home and school. Utilizing leadership, advocacy, specialized technical skills and knowledge, data, and collaboration, school-based occupational therapists promote overall academic and functional success by providing services that enhance student, school, home, and community partnerships and alleviate barriers to learning.

Intended Purpose of the Standards

The North Carolina School-Based Occupational Therapy Standards serve as a guide for school-based occupational therapists as they continuously improve their effectiveness. It is imperative for the school-based occupational therapist to provide services as part of a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary team whose members have complementary knowledge, skills, and experiences.

The North Carolina School-Based Occupational Therapy Standards will:

- guide the development of the skills and knowledge germane to the occupational therapy profession in the twenty-first century;
- provide the focus for schools and districts as they employ, support, monitor, and evaluate their occupational therapists; and
- assist higher education programs in aligning the content and requirements of occupational therapy education curricula with expectations for practice.

Standard 1: School-based occupational therapists demonstrate leadership, advocacy, and collaborative and ethical practice.

Element a. Leadership. School-based occupational therapists support and promote high professional standards for themselves and for their colleagues. They are knowledgeable of and actively implement school, department, district, State, and professional goals, and provide guidance to others in doing likewise.

Element b. Teamwork. School-based occupational therapists work collaboratively with school and district personnel to create professional learning communities that enhance student learning and create positive working environments. School-based occupational therapists provide input into the selection of professional development to build staff capacity and address the needs of students. They anticipate, problem-solve, and share the workload of the department.

Element c. Vision. School-based occupational therapists embrace, communicate, and contribute to the strategic vision of the local district, department, and assigned schools to help ensure that all students are equipped and prepared with life skills for the 21st century. School-based occupational therapists articulate core beliefs and values of the profession, department and local district. They establish standards of excellence to create a professional learning community.

Element d. Ethics. School-based occupational therapists exhibit high ethical standards. School-based occupational therapists demonstrate honesty, integrity, fair treatment, and respect for others. They uphold the relevant codes of ethics and standards of professional practice. (See Appendix A for the American Occupational Therapy Association's Standards of Practice.)

Element e. Advocacy. School-based occupational therapists advocate for positive changes in policies and practices affecting student learning and occupational therapy service delivery. They participate in the implementation of initiatives designed to improve educational and support services to promote positive student outcomes. They advocate for occupational therapy services to address student needs and support learning.

Element f. Supervision and Oversight. School-based occupational therapists value supervision that provides support, education, monitoring of service delivery, and creates a safe forum to reflect on professional practice to positively impact student learning outcomes.

Standard 2: School-based occupational therapists promote a respectful environment for diverse populations.

Element a. Communication. School-based occupational therapists use language that is appropriate and easily understood by the listener, and they adapt their communication for their audiences. They are active listeners, respect cultural differences, and assist others in communicating effectively.

Element b. Least Restrictive Environment. School-based occupational therapists help to ensure that every student receives services in the least restrictive environment. They continually monitor service delivery to reflect the least restrictive environment for the students they serve. They actively assist other school personnel to develop and implement appropriate contexts and strategies for students with differing needs.

Element c. Diversity. School-based occupational therapists recognize the influence of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, health, culture, ability, and other factors on development and personality. They adapt professional activities to reflect these differences among the students, families, and staff they serve. School-based occupational therapists create and encourage an environment that is inviting, respectful, supportive, inclusive, and flexible for every student.

Standard 3: School-based occupational therapists apply the skills and knowledge of their profession within educational settings.

Element a. Program Administration and Management. School-based occupational therapists effectively structure work tasks in accordance with local, state, and federal requirements and best practice guidelines. School-based occupational therapists assume professional responsibility for safe, effective, and timely delivery of occupational therapy (OT) services, and the oversight and/or improvement of occupational therapy systems and services.

Element b. Policies and Laws. School-based occupational therapists are knowledgeable and skillful regarding state and federal legislation, professional standards, best practice guidelines, and local policy.

Element c. Work behaviors. School-based occupational therapists are flexible, efficient, timely, reliable, and competent. They are engaged and responsive team members, as evidenced by adhering to deadlines, setting priorities, and setting appropriate limits. They are productive and complete assigned work with a positive attitude. They demonstrate safe, healthy, and ergonomically correct work practices.

Standard 4: School-based occupational therapists facilitate student learning for optimal student performance and functional independence.

Element a. Common Core and Essential Standards. School-based occupational therapists ground their practice in school-related occupations and support student progress in the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (Common Core and Essential Standards).

Element b. Evidence-based Practice. School-based occupational therapists plan, deliver, and revise appropriate interventions based on evaluation data. They review current occupational therapy and other pertinent professional literature; use reliable, valid assessments; plan interventions based on research; build and work from their own clinical knowledge and expertise; and evaluate the effectiveness of their work based on analysis of evidence.

Element c. Evaluation and Identification. School-based occupational therapists gather student performance data using contextual observation, standardized assessments, interviews, file reviews, student work samples, and other inquiry methods as deemed

appropriate. They interpret evaluation data for the student's team to assist with decisions regarding special education eligibility, goals, placement, accommodations, supports, and services. School-based occupational therapists serve on student intervention teams as appropriate, consult on classroom interventions, and provide strategies to build teacher capacity for instructing a variety of learners.

Element d. Planning and Intervention. School-based occupational therapists carefully consider evaluation data, IEP goals, ongoing progress monitoring data, and the least restrictive environment in planning services that meet the needs of students. They intervene in the context the student routinely needs to perform the targeted occupation, in collaboration with instructional staff. Interventions are connected to student participation in learning the curriculum, demonstration of knowledge, life and career skills, socialization, and transition.

Standard 5: School-based occupational therapists use all available data to examine their effectiveness and to adapt and improve professional practice.

Element a. Professional Development. School-based occupational therapists continually participate in high quality professional development specific to school based occupational therapy practice that reflects a global view of educational practices, includes 21st century skills and knowledge, and aligns with the State Board of Education priorities and initiatives. They use input from stakeholders to continually assess, maintain, expand, and document their competence in school-based practice.

b. Outcomes. School-based occupational therapists systematically and critically evaluate the effectiveness of comprehensive occupational therapy services on student performance. They collect and interpret data from a variety of sources to assess student response to intervention and progress, plan future services, and adapt practice to best meet the needs of students, staff, and families.