

School Based Practice for Occupational Therapy Certificate



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Curriculum

The work of occupational therapists in the schools has changed remarkably since their introduction in the early 1970s. Occupational therapists were recognized as a service provider under the IDEA law to enter the school districts to enable all students to receive an education (Frolek & Chandler, 2019). However, at the time, occupational therapists were trained primarily in a medical model of service delivery addressing deficits in function. Services were generally designed for students based on this medical model and therapists were left to apply services based on an improper framework. The inclusion of occupational therapists in the school setting came before the current implementation of evidence-based practices. Today, due to the research and evidence to support our role, occupational therapists and the services they provide in the school-setting have undergone an immense shift from the medical model to a more ecological and naturalistic approach.

Occupational therapists today are able to focus on the function that enables a student to fully participate in their natural educational environment. Due to the progress made in evidence-based interventions, occupational therapists support students across school settings, focusing on the strengths of the student rather than the deficits. This new role has been emerging for more than three decades (Frolek & Chander, 2019), but this evolution for therapists remains hindered by a lack of understanding and education and the tendency to maintain the status quo. The need to deliver federally mandated, evidence-based interventions under discrepant state interpretations requires an understanding of current research and literature. Education and dissemination of best practices needs to occur and be directed by the therapists who work in the school systems.

More than one-quarter of occupational therapists work in school systems (AOTA, 2020). This makes school-based practice the second-largest specialty in the field of occupational therapy (AOTA, 2020). The AOTA has recognized the school-based practices as a subset of pediatrics and supports therapists with a specialty certification in the school systems. This recognition distinguishes the work and role of school-based therapists from their professional peers (AOTA, 2020). It also promotes the role of school-based therapists with a specialty designation that empowers best-practice interventions for occupational therapists in the school system. To encourage and develop competencies to remain relevant and advocate for occupational therapists' role in educational settings, therapists must develop advanced knowledge and skills to support the interventions, application, and

delivery of services in school systems from a best practice, evidence-supported means. The School Based Practice Certificate was specifically designed to develop and enhance competencies needed for occupational therapy professions to meet the ever-changing demands of the school system practice settings.

American Occupational Therapy Association (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.ota.org/~media/Corporate/Files/Secure/Educations-Careers/Salary-Survey/2015-AOTA-Workforce-Salary-Survey-LOW-RES.pdf>

Frolek G.C., Rioux, J.E., & Chandler, B.E. (2019). Best Practices in Universal Design for Learning, in Best Practices for Occupational Therapy in Schools. AOTA Press. Bethesda, MA.

Certificate Outcomes

Upon completion of the three-course sequence for occupational therapy in school systems, students will be able to:

1. Differentiate levels of evidence as applied in best practice for occupational therapy in school systems.
2. Demonstrate the use of current and best practice applications in the evaluation, design, and implementation of occupational therapy services in the school systems.
3. Discuss legal governance for federal, state, and local service delivery in the school system.
4. Integrate the OTPF-4 and occupational performance concepts into practice within school settings.

Admission Requirements

1. A minimum of a bachelor's degree in occupational therapy from an accredited college or university.
2. One year of clinical practice.
3. Possess information technology skills sufficient to participate effectively in an online learning management system, such as, WebStudy, Blackboard, Angel, and Canvas.

Students in the School Based Practice for Occupational Therapy Certificate program will take the courses in the following sequence, with entry points in the Winter and Fall semesters each year:

1. SBP 718 Practice Models & Evidence: Current School-System Best Practices
2. SBP 728 Behavior, Sensory, & Mental Health Issues in School Settings
3. SBP 738 Application of Best-Practice Interventions in School Systems

Students are expected to complete the certificate within three to four semester period from the first day of enrollment in the program. All courses are offered in a 15-week term.

Program Requirements

Course Code	Course Title	Semesters Taught:	
		Summer Start	Fall Start
SBP 718	Practice Models & Evidence: Current School-System Best Practices	Summer 2024	Fall 2024
SBP 728	Behavior, Sensory, & Mental Health Issues in School Settings	Fall 2024	Winter 2025
SBP 738	Application of Best-Practice Interventions in School Systems	Winter 2025	Summer 2025

Course Descriptions

SBP 718 Practice Models & Evidence: Current School-System Best Practices (3 credits)

Students will develop an understanding of the historical concepts related to medical and ecological service provision, direct versus consultative services, and the legal application of occupational therapy as a service provider in the educational system. Students will review and understand the federal, state, and district practice including 504's, accommodations, and multi-tiered support systems. Educational modules will focus on understanding the occupational therapy role in the least restrictive environment, participation, and introduction of the occupational therapy practice framework. Students will explore and utilize strength-based and occupational performance assessments to implement in their school setting, as well as demonstrate the construction of student-centered goals to support educational outcomes. Using literature to develop evidence-supported interventions and how to apply a learner -centered individualized education plans will be discussed. Assistive technology, linking goals to curriculum and state/district standards, and least restrictive educational environments will be addressed.

SBP 728 Behavior, Sensory, & Mental Health Issues in School Settings (3 credits)

Review of current law and funding for mental health, implications for practice, and advocacy for occupational therapy in mental health programs as related to educational environments is a focus of this course. Emerging practice issues including such sensory processing innovations, multi-tiered support systems, positive behavioral supports, and school-wide curriculum adoption for mental health initiatives will be discussed. Students will delve into sensory-based, emotion and self-regulation and other sensory related interventions will be explored as they relate to school-based settings and populations.

SBP 738 Application of Best-Practice Interventions in School Systems (3 credits)

This final course in the school-based certificate focuses on refining the students collaboration skills, ethics, and reflective practice, interprofessional education to understand perspectives, and synthesis of skills and knowledge in current, best-practice models for in school-systems for occupational therapy professionals. Students will research and explore the application of using best evidence to treat, intervene, and support various students' needs. Opportunities to delve deeper into specific research for identified disabilities and efficacious interventions to promote participation in educational settings will be provided. Using resources from case studies and real-life scenarios, students will develop occupation-based intervention plans for students using knowledge gained from courses I (Practice Models and Evidence: Current School-System Best Practices) and II (Behavior, Sensory and Mental Health Issues in School Settings) and construct resources for use in virtual therapy sessions, using these resources in a collaborative module for alternative service delivery.