



## **Ask OTIS: How Students Get OT as Their Only Special Education Service**

***Can I have an OT only student?*** Yes. If the team has determined that the student is eligible for special education, the team can determine that the profession with the best skills and expertise to provide the specially designed instruction (SDI) is the OT.

***What are the criteria for having an OT only student?*** First the student has to be eligible for special education and then the team must determine that the OT is the one who has the skills and expertise to provide the SDI. So, you must meet the "3-pronged test" – the student has a disability, the disability affects the educational program and the student requires SDI. Depending on the student's needs, it could be very difficult to justify seeing an "OT only" kid once a week if OT is the student's only SDI. Resource room teachers don't see kids once a week – SDI means that you are regularly providing an adapted, modified or somehow otherwise changed instruction so the student can receive "free appropriate public education" (FAPE) in the "least restrictive environment" (LRE). The key is that the OT's skills and expertise are needed for the student to receive FAPE in the LRE. You may find it helpful to look at the questions that were developed by Micheal Giangreco based on research and the legislation. You can find them in the Vermont IEP guidelines. Access the guidelines by going to [www.uvm.edu](http://www.uvm.edu) and then search for "Giangreco" Then look through his resources to find the Vermont Guidelines. You can download them for free.

***What if the student receives speech services but not special education?*** OT services would only be appropriate if the OT has the skills and expertise necessary to address the factors that are interfering with the student's ability to receive FAPE in the LRE as a speech only student. For example, articulation difficulties would not justify OT services to work on gross motor skills. In order to provide gross motor services, there would probably need to be a re-evaluation by the team and another disability (eligibility) category determined.

***If these students are not eligible for OT services, can they receive services on a 504 plan?*** If the student has an identified disability, then he or she can be placed on a 504 plan. However, different districts have different interpretations regarding Section 504. Generally, you don't provide "therapy" under a 504 plan although OT services may be indicated to help with the development and implementation of appropriate accommodations and/or adaptations. Since 504 is part of general education, many districts don't have special education staff working in this area. However, the district is responsible for ensuring that the person with the appropriate skills and expertise is involved in the development and implementation of the plan.

*This article was written by Yvonne Swinth, Sara Woodward, and Dottie Handley-More, OTIS Co-Chairs. It originally appeared in the WOTA Newsletter in February, 2005 (Volume 63, Number 1 p. 5).*

*OTIS (Occupational Therapists In Schools) is a standing committee for the Washington Occupational Therapy Association (WOTA) that was set up to help support therapists in school-based practice.*