Federal and state laws mandate that PT in schools be educationally relevant. Delivery of service in the school setting is different from clinically based, medically necessary treatment. Although medical conditions or disabilities may be present, unless it impacts the student’s ability to benefit from their educational program (IEP), the student is not eligible for services. The determination of the need for PT services is ultimately the decision of the student’s IEP team. Best practices dictate that professionals do not function in isolation from one another. Instead, collaboration among students, parents, teachers and related service providers occur throughout the delivery of services, which includes evaluation, service planning and progress monitoring. With a collaborative focus, team members formulate a “holistic” set of services for each student based upon the expertise from all team members.

Clear and on-going documentation of the student’s progress during intervention will provide data for deciding about future needs and the level and amount of services to be provided. The needs of each student will be the driving force behind how services are determined and provided. The PT will keep progress notes and summary notes to reflect the student’s current performance status and will communicate the student's progress to all team members.

When the student achieves the skills associated with the goals and objectives listed in the IEP, the student no longer needs PT services in order to benefit from special education services, or the student’s disability no longer adversely affects educational performance, the IEP team will review this progress and the interventions provided. If the IEP team determines that the student no longer needs PT services to benefit from his/her special education services, then the student will be dismissed from the PT services.

### WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK A STUDENT NEEDS THE SERVICES OF A PT?

A parent should discuss any concerns with the student's teacher. The teacher will consult with the PT provider assigned to the student’s school and can possibly refer the student to the Student Study Team (SST) by identifying the area of concern. If the student is already receiving special education services under an IEP, the teacher and parent should address the area of concern to the IEP team for discussion and determination of further action.

**References:**

For more information about PT services in the schools, contact the building administrator.

Horry County Schools does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, immigration status, English-speaking status, or any other characteristic protected by applicable federal or S.C. law in its programs or activities. For questions regarding its nondiscriminatory policies, contact 843-488-6933.
The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 04) requires that “...all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living.” [CFR §300.1]

Under IDEA 04, a student must need special education to be considered eligible for related services. Physical Therapy (PT) is recognized as one of the related services for which eligible students may qualify.

The referral for PT services is usually answered by a screening that may or may not lead to a formal evaluation. Problem-solving strategies may be implemented prior to making a formal referral. These activities may include providing or modifying equipment, providing strategies to the teacher to enhance student performance, and providing interventions to the student in the area of concern. The purpose of pre-referral is to support the student’s learning in the natural or least restrictive environment. If the student’s IEP team determines a need for a full evaluation, parental permission will be obtained. The evaluation will assess the child’s performance areas using methods appropriate to the child’s age and development level. Evaluation methods may include: observations in a multiple settings, interviews with the child, teacher, parent; review of records; and comparison of educational requirements with student performance. Once the evaluation is completed, the IEP team will meet to review the documented results, discuss the student’s need for PT services, and develop/revise the student’s IEP.

The primary focus of Physical Therapy (PT) in the school setting is to ensure that each student is able to function in their educational setting so that a student can benefit from the special education services. PT services generally address a child’s posture, muscle strength, mobility, and organization of movement in educational environments. PT may be provided to prevent the progression of impairment, functional limitation, disability, or changes in physical function or health resulting from injury, disease, or other causes. Qualified providers of these services may:

- Provide treatment to increase joint function, muscle strength, mobility, and endurance;
- Address gross motor skills that rely on the large muscles of the body involved in physical movement and range of motion;
- Help improve the student’s posture, gait, and body awareness; and
- Monitor the function, fit, and proper use of mobility aids and devices.

The type and amount of services a student receives are determined by the IEP team based upon the evaluation information.

The critical determinants are the individual, unique educational needs of the student and the most appropriate manner in which these educational needs can be met. Consideration will be given to the level of expertise required to provide the intervention, the student’s potential for positive change with the intervention and the type of equipment, if needed. Methods for delivering PT services are varied. There is no hierarchy of service delivery options; one method is not inherently “better” than another. Deciding which model(s) to use will depend on the individual student circumstances, including the identified needs, the instructional services and the goals/objectives determined by the IEP team.

Service delivery options may include:

**Direct Therapy:** Provision of therapy by a PT provider in a distraction-free environment. This type of service may be provided in the classroom, in a therapy room, around the school facility or any combination of these. This type of therapy may be provided either in a large group, small group and/or individually based upon the student’s needs. This method of intervention is provided when specific techniques cannot be safely delegated to other school staff members. Emphasis is placed on the acquisition of new skills.

**Consultative/Indirect Therapy:** Provision of services within the learning environment with support of others within that setting. The teacher, parent, aide or other school personnel implement educationally related activities, assistive technology and/or adaptive materials. Emphasis is placed on accommodations to the learning environment and may include services provided on behalf of the student rather than directly with the student.

**Integrated Therapy:** Provision of services within the learning environment with support of others within that setting and may include a separate environment at times. Interventions include educationally related functional activities with an emphasis on practice of newly acquired motor skills within the daily routine.