Successful Participation at School:
Strategies for All Students

School occupational therapy practitioners promote students' successful and independent participation across school-based routines and settings. Through ongoing team collaborations, including those with students, occupational therapy practitioners foster student access and progress through curricular and extracurricular activities. Occupational therapy practitioners offer evidence-based interventions that diminish or eliminate barriers to participation and build competencies required for learning, positive behavior, and social participation. Occupational therapy practitioners use data collection methods to monitor the effectiveness of interventions and supports like those suggested in this document.

Children can present with varying areas and degrees of strengths and needs. All items are written with the intent that an educator can differentiate supports and interventions to create the best fit between the student and the strategies.

As an educator, if you want to:	Consider these tips to:	An occupational therapy practitioner offers expertise to:
Improve student behavior	Prevent unwanted behaviors before they occur:[1] • Provide incentives for maintaining appropriate behavior • Provide predictability through visual daily schedules, reminders, or technology • Provide clear rules • Use a visual timer to assist students with gauging time. Infuse more movement opportunities throughout the school day:[2,3] • Add stretch breaks • Offer "helper" tasks • Promote recess • Avoid recess removal as punishment. Model and encourage expected behavior:[4] • Pair the at-risk child with a "buddy" • Use positive statements such as, "Please walk" rather than "Don't run."	Coach students to develop and follow a schedule for successful task completion. Collaborate with the educator to accommodate diverse learning styles by identifying strategies that improve attention and behavior. Teach students strategies to promote self-correction and self-advocacy (i.e., using visual reminders for cueing). Evaluate the classroom's features and layout and provide suggestions for modifications to decrease distractions and promote learning.[5] Assist the teacher in applying strategies for sensory and emotional regulation within classrooms so students are ready to learn.[6] Promote inclusiveness through activity and environmental modifications to increase curricular access and participation.[12] Incorporate friendship promotion and leisure coaching into the classroom.[13] Provide organizational strategies for individual students, groups, or whole classrooms to improve transition within and between school activities. Adapt recess activities and structures to include all children.
Improve attention to instruction and ability to work more independently	Monitor the classroom environment for student distractions, and be mindful of sensory characteristics of the room:[7] • Break tasks into small "chunks" • Use a visual timer to assist students with gauging estimating elapsed time • Reduce visual and auditory distractions with earplugs, visors, or sunglasses. Create novelty to capture attention (e.g., by varying voice inflection and volume, or varying your position in the room while providing instruction). Provide seating and positioning options and alternatives:[8,9] • Ball chairs • Seat cushions • Tables of sufficient height to work while standing • Seated work interspersed with movement.	Eliminate barriers by using Universal Design for Learning principles within classroom instruction, activities, and environment.[14] Use expertise in activity analysis to create the "just right challenge" for a student. Evaluate the classroom for distractions, and modify the classroom environment based on students' learning preferences.[15] Recommend appropriate technology and devices to promote sustained attention.[16]

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As an educator, if you want to:	Consider these tips to:	An occupational therapy practitioner offers expertise to:
Help a student manage his or her emotions	Incorporate stress reduction techniques prior to challenging activities such as testing:[10,11] • Deep breathing • Stretching • Meditation • Yoga. Assist students with emotional regulation: • Acknowledge the student's emotions with eye contact and calm language • Assist students to identify and gauge their emotions[18] • Help students recognize their physical symptoms associated with stress with an intensity chart • Place students who are upset in close proximity rather than in time out. Create a positive environment conducive to learning: • Set clear expectations for positive classroom behaviors • Use visual aids such as traffic lights or thermometers to monitor the classroom climate.	Conduct screenings or monitor for early signs of depression, psychosis, or anxiety, and refer for further diagnostic evaluation.[17] Assist the teacher in differentiating and addressing sensory processing challenges from other behavior issues.[21] Provide targeted early intervention strategies for students at risk of developing Mental Health challenges (e.g., provide leisure coaching for students at risk of limited leisure participation).[22] Provide intensive individualized interventions for students already identified with Mental health challenges (e.g., organize occupation-based groups to foster social, emotional, and cognitive skills). Collaborate with other school personnel to run groups about emotional regulation and conflict resolution. Provide graded activities for optimizing mental health for all students (e.g., by creating positive environments). Consider the developmental level of the students in choosing tools to engage and to provide positive behavioral supports in the classroom. Support social emotional learning with programs such as Zones of Regulation,[23] and the Alert program.[24]
Promote friendship and peer interaction	Foster opportunities for friendship development and reduction of bullying:[19,20] • Promote a buddy system, and provide opportunities for group work • Group isolated students with empathetic students during activities • Teach inclusion as part of the classroom curriculum • Offer leadership opportunities for disengaged students. • Offer bullying prevention or cultural sensitivity programs.	Assist students at recess or lunchtime in initiating opportunities for socialization through communication, play, or movement activities within the student's capabilities.[25] Recommend appropriate after-school activities based on the student's individual needs and strengths.[26] Collaborate with educators to implement programs that foster self-esteem and social skills.[27] Advocate for a Tier 1 whole school approach to promoting mental health.[27]
Promote/ improve academic performance in areas such as literacy and numeracy	Accommodate a variety of student needs: • Provide instructional accommodations that allow students to learn within the framework of the state standards • Provide alternate seating and positioning, writing tools of varying widths and sensory characteristics, and opportunities for completing work in varied positions (e.g., sitting, standing, laying on floor) • Adapt tasks for visual challenges (e.g., use larger font, higher contrast, or wider-rule paper). Provide direct instruction and adequate practice within the school day for students to develop and maintain the motor skill of handwriting:[28,29] • Letter formation • Baseline alignment • Letter sizing and spacing. Provide structure for written assignments: • Graphic organizers • Sentence starters. Provide alternate strategies for students to document their learning, such as technology, and instruct students in their use: • Smart pens • Portable word processors • Word prediction software • IPad apps • Text-to-speech programs • MyScript calculator. Use class-wide peer tutoring to improve reading skills.[30]	Analyze student function to suggest appropriate intervention strategies and accommodations to improve visual perceptual, sequencing, and other areas of performance that impact participation. Trial/implement assistive technology to enable students to participate in academic work and assessments based on state standards.[31] Advise educators on handwriting instruction techniques and strategies based on typical development and principles of motor learning.[28,32] Match technology options to students' strengths and needs. Provide techniques to optimize keyboarding instruction.[33]

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Improve Executive function	Assist students with organizing materials needed for classwork: • Provide for or teach ways to organize the student's desk, binder, and backpack • Teach task components such as collating, stapling, or folding paper, and inserting into appropriate files • Emphasize expectations • Fade out cues to promote independence • Break down projects into discrete steps and develop a timeline for completion • Provide predetermined spaces for the student to store materials.	Analyze classroom routines to provide a sequence of steps for task completion. Provide cues for time management, prioritizing tasks, and on-task behavior.[36] Create checklists to organize materials needed when transitioning from one class to another. Provide environmental supports, such as timers, "First/Then" cards. Adapt tasks, routines, and environments to enhance participation.[37]
Increase personal independence in daily school routines	Improve student personal independence, self-care, and hygiene: • Review/teach basic component skills of managing self and belongings when engaging in activities such as eating lunch; manipulating backpack, coat, and locker; and toileting[34] • Promote and encourage walking to school when feasible to increase overall physical activity.[35]	Coach educators to address varied components (cognitive, sensory, motor, perceptual, etc.) within activities that impact life skills.[38] Suggest activities to help all students develop the component skills for independence in self-care.[39] Promote healthy school routines through surveillance and intervention during cafeteria, recess, and transportation time. Contribute to development/implementation of self-determined formal and/or informal transition goals and plans for future independent community living.[40,41]

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