Companion Manual for School-based Occupational Therapists: *Evidence Informed Practices and Resources for Effective Intervention.*

Naomi Bylund, Amy Gerritsen, Hannah Lee, Hannah Warren, & Katey Howland, EdD, MS, OTR/L

School of Occupational Therapy, Husson University, Bangor Maine

Purpose

This project was developed at the request of the Maine Department of Education to explore evidence-based practices in school-based occupational therapy and develop guidelines for occupational therapists (OT) in the state. A compilation of research provides valuable resources on key areas like MTSS/RTI, universal design for learning, workload models, types of service delivery, collaboration, and the importance of integrating OT within general education to enhance student outcomes.

Research Questions

- **RQ1**. What are best practices in school-based occupational therapy for workload vs. caseload model, MTSS, push in/pull out?
- **RQ2**. What is the evidence around interprofessional collaboration and the impact of school-based occupational therapists' effectiveness?

Methods

A literature review was conducted to explore current evidence based best practice used in school-based OT service delivery models. Keywords related to topics were used to locate relevant research, which was then analyzed using a level of evidence framework to determine its strength and applicability. Additionally, key stakeholders, including school-based OTs and educational administrators in Maine were consulted to determine the specific needs and challenges faced by OTs in the state. Their insights helped shape the content and focus of the companion manual, ensuring its relevance and practical application in Maine's school systems, particularly in rural areas.



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Definitions	
Workload Model	Considers all school-based OT responsibilities, including direct and indirect services.
Caseload Model	Focuses only on the number of students receiving direct OT services.
Service Delivery Types	**Push-in Services** OT services delivered within the classroom to promote inclusion.
	Pull-out Services OT sessions delivered outside the classroom for individualized support.
Response to Intervention (RTI)	A tiered system of interventions to support students before formal special education referral.
MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports)	A framework that integrates academic, behavioral, and social-emotional interventions.
Universal Design for Learning (UDL)	An approach to curriculum design ensuring accessibility for all students.

Literature Review

The following table is a summary of the evidence outlined in the companion manual. Citations found directly in Companion Manual below.

Workload	Implementing a workload model in school-based OT can improve service quality, reduce burnout, and support best practices. Tools like workload calculators can help advocate for more efficient, collaborative service delivery.
MTSS/RTI	When OTs collaborate with teachers through RTI, it promotes consistent use of fine and visual-motor strategies in the classroom. Early, integrated support—guided by tools like rubrics—can prevent long-term needs and enhance service delivery within MTSS. The workload model may also increase OT participation in RTI efforts.
Service Delivery Types	Based on previous surveys current Maine Occuaptioanl Therapy practitioners are mainly utilizing pull out service delivery. However, the literature supports there is strong evidence in the different tiers of RTI which included multi-service delivery types.
UDL	Using the UDL framework, OTs can collaborate with teachers to design accessible, inclusive learning experiences by recommending varied materials and strategies that support participation for all learners. Tools like CAST help guide this approach.
Interprofessional Collaboration	Interprofessional collaboration is essential for student success. When OTs lead and participate in IPE teams, they support individualized, classroom, and school-wide goals. This collaboration strengthen service delivery models like RTI and push-in/pull-out.

Companion Manual

The companion manual provides school-based occupational therapists with an easily accessible and comprehensive guide to the evidence-based literature surrounding key aspects of their practice. This resource aims to streamline access to evidence-informed practices and resources, eliminating the need for OTs to independently track down this information. We hope this companion manual serves as a tool to help school-based OTs deliver high quality services for the diverse needs of students.

Companion Manual Website

Scan to view

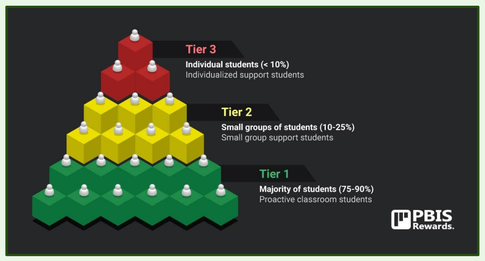
Addressing the Needs of Rural Communities

Maine's rural schools face challenges in accessing occupational therapy services due to therapist shortages and limited professional development opportunities. These barriers can hinder effective implementation of evidence-based practice. This project's companion manual addresses these gaps by equipping school-based OTs with evidence-informed strategies for workload models, MTSS/RTI, service delivery, and collaboration. By streamlining best practices, this resource supports efficient service delivery and maximizes student success in rural Maine.



Implications for Practice and Next Steps

The integration of OTs within MTSS presents an opportunity to redefine the role of OT in schools. Occupational therapists play a vital role in supporting students within MTSS and RTI frameworks. This approach benefits all students and potentially reduces the need for more intensive and individualized interventions (Bazyk et al., 2009; Ohl et al., 2013). The literature emphasizes the need for evidence-based, collaborative service models that integrate occupational therapy into general education. By shifting toward a workload-based model, OTs can increase productivity allowing for broader service delivery. By embedding OTs within MTSS through a workload-based model, schools can enhance student access to occupational therapy services while optimizing therapist efficiency and impact. Ongoing work with the Maine Department of Education to provide educational sessions across the state will begin. Feedback from practitioners and resources will be discussed to aid in implementation. Future research surrounding workload across the state, and the implementation of MTSS/RTI models should be studied.



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References

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Research Contact
Katey Howland
School of Occupational Therapy
Husson University
Bangor, ME
howlandk@husson.edu

Project Implementation Contact
Lauren Fysh
School of Occupational Therapy
Husson University
Bangor, ME
fyshl@husson.edu