Current Status of IDEA Reauthorization

The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990, Public Law 101-476; originally called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 [Public Law 94-142]) provides the underpinnings for the delivery of occupational therapy to children with disabilities. Occupational therapy is included in IDEA as an educationally related service for children and young adults ages 3 years to 21 years and as an early intervention service for infants and toddlers from birth to 3 years. During the past 3 years of discussion and debate in the U.S. Congress around the reauthorization of IDEA (at publication of this American Journal of Occupational Therapy special issue on school-based practice, this process was not complete, but funding to continue IDEA services had been appropriated for fiscal year 1997), many key issues have emerged about the delivery of occupational therapy. Practitioners and researchers need to understand the implications of these issues:

- **Cost of services**: Many local school officials have indicated to Congress that related services overburden their budgets. Better data are needed to analyze costs in relation to children's needs.
- **Appropriateness**: Questions about whether services like occupational therapy are educationally or medically related have arisen. Practice must continue to emphasize support of teaching and learning and be in line with individual educational goals.
- **Natural environments**: Early intervention services have always emphasized the family, including training parents to provide services at home. Cost and other factors are pushing lawmakers to overemphasize these "natural" environments and methods, perhaps at the expense of making quality professional services available to children. However, this increase in emphasis should not diminish the importance or availability of professional, quality services.

All these issues will continue to challenge the federal government and local schools and programs. The occupational therapy profession must be alert to and proactive in considering these factors in order to improve delivery of its services. ▲

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**References**
