BRIEF OR NEW

State Guidelines for School-Based Occupational Therapy: 1989 Survey

Shirley Holland Carr

Key Words: occupational therapy services • public schools

After the enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94–142), the public schools recruited 18.3% of all occupational therapists (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 1982), the current percentage being 17% (AOTA, 1986; I. Silvergleit, personal communication, May 1989). For the first time, visible numbers of therapists were practicing outside of the medical model. One way in which occupational therapists were able to orient and integrate themselves into the educational service provision model (Coutinho & Hunter, 1988) was through the development and distribution of guidelines for school-based occupational therapy.

National and state professional associations, groups of school-based therapists, local school districts, and state departments of education were among the groups providing guidelines to ease the transition to school-based practice. The latter group's guidelines generally responded to the problems that were created as local education agencies initiated occupational therapy services (Louisiana Department of Education, 1980, 1984; Tennessee Department of Education, 1987).

My daily use of the guidelines developed by the Louisiana Department of Education (1984) and the eligibility criteria adopted by the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (1987) (see also Carr, 1989) fostered my interest in state guidelines and prompted this survey.

The purposes of this study were to determine which states and territories developed occupational therapy and physical therapy guidelines after the enactment of Public Law 94–142 and the content areas addressed by these guidelines. This paper reports the occupational therapy data only. Please note that throughout the remainder of this paper, the term states refers to both states and territories.

Methodology

A questionnaire was mailed to the chief education officer of each state (n = 57), with a follow-up mailing 4 months later to the 15 officers who did not respond. The total response was 87.7% (n = 50), with officers from 6 states and 1 territory not responding (see Table 1). Three states whose guidelines consisted only of a definition of the term occupational therapist were counted as having no guidelines.

Results

Most states enclosed a copy of their guidelines; these guidelines varied greatly from state to state (see Table 2). One state, Alabama, would not share a copy until their guidelines are adopted.
Geographically, 41% of northern states (Federal Regions I, II, III, V, VIII, and X) and 40.9% of southern states (Federal Regions IV, VI, and IX) had guidelines. Of the states with the largest populations (California, New York, Texas, and Florida) (Hoffman, 1989) and with the most occupational therapists (California, New York, Florida, and Massachusetts) (Silvergilt, personal communication, May 1989), only Florida had guidelines at the time of this writing. The states with guidelines can be categorized geographically into four groups: (a) the Southeast (8 states), (b) the Midwest (5 states), (c) the Northwest (2 states), and (d) the Northeast (2 states), and Hawaii.

The states without guidelines reported using alternate guidelines available through local educational agencies, universities, and professional associations. North Dakota, for example, had no state guidelines, but several local education agencies within that state publish their own. Michigan referred to guidelines published by the Michigan Alliance of Physical and Occupational Therapists. Two states said they used the publications Guidelines for Occupational Therapy Services in School Systems (AOTA, 1989) and Training: Occupational Therapy Educational Management in Schools (Gilfoyle & Hays, 1980) and referred inquiries to these publications as well. All of the states with guidelines published one volume for both occupational therapy and physical therapy guidelines, except North Carolina, which published a volume for each of the two professions.

Implications

Of the 57 state departments of education that were sent this survey, 50 responded. Twenty-five of the 50 responding states had or were in the process of compiling guidelines, but only 9 states had actual guidelines that assist local education agencies and occupa-

### Table 1
**Guideline Status by State/Territory (N = 57)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Territory</th>
<th>Has Guidelines</th>
<th>State/Territory</th>
<th>Has Guidelines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Samoa</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>NR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>NR</td>
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<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>No^b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>No^a</td>
<td>North Mariana</td>
<td>No^a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Columbia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guam</td>
<td>No^a</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>South Carolina</td>
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<td>South Dakota</td>
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<td>Iowa</td>
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<td>Texas</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>Yes^b</td>
<td>Texas</td>
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<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>Yes^b</td>
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<td>Maine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>NR</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. NR = no response to survey. NA = no data available.
^a Developing guidelines. ^b Revising guidelines. ^c Reorganizing guidelines.

Thirty-two (64%) of the 50 responding states reported not having guidelines; however, 7 of these states, at the time of this writing, were in the process of developing guidelines. Eighteen (36%) of the 50 responding states reported that they did have guidelines.

### Table 2
**Content Areas Addressed by Individual States' Guidelines**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Area</th>
<th>AL</th>
<th>CT</th>
<th>FL</th>
<th>GA</th>
<th>HI</th>
<th>IN</th>
<th>IA</th>
<th>KS</th>
<th>LA</th>
<th>NC</th>
<th>OK</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>TN</th>
<th>VT</th>
<th>VA</th>
<th>WA</th>
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<th>Total</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. + = addressed in guidelines; - = not addressed in guidelines.
tional therapists in working together; 14 states had no guidelines. An anticipated 1-year follow-up survey will indicate the progress that the states have made.

State education agencies rely on occupational therapists as experts on task forces, as indicated by acknowledgments printed in the forewords of detailed guidelines. Except for one therapist from a small territory who was the designated representative for the state agency, there was no indication from this survey that occupational therapists employed by their respective states are in a position to coordinate or influence that state’s occupational therapy practice in the public schools.

With the number of states developing or revising guidelines, this is an opportune time for occupational therapists to become involved in the process. Experienced school-based therapists in all states should consider contacting their state departments of education and offering volunteer or paid assistance. Such involvement could contribute to the quality and equal access of services to students with disabilities and to increased uniformity in our school-based practices.

The therapist should be aware that it may be more helpful to contact the department of education within one’s own state for information, assistance, and two-way communication rather than to request guidelines from many states. Each state appears to tailor its guidelines to its therapists’ needs. I found, for example, that other states’ guidelines did not apply to my Louisiana-based practice.

Acknowledgments
I am grateful to each state education agency that replied to the survey questionnaire, and I appreciate the encouragement of Marlyn Moore and Aeneid Mason, my supervisors at the East Baton Rouge Parish Schools.

References