



December 8, 2020

Claudine Munroe
Director, Special Education and Success for All Branch
Ontario Ministry of Education

Delivered by email

Dear Claudine,

We were so pleased to have opportunity to meet with you and Anne Sealey in late August to discuss the roles occupational therapists could play to increase capacity to address the mental health needs of Ontario students. We recognize that this has been a challenging fall and that managing the balance of needs and risks for students has weighed heavily on the Ministry and the government. At this time, as the pandemic continues to challenge everyday life, we reiterate our profession's commitment to support the Ministry, Ontario's school system, and students.

We are pleased to provide further information about the role of occupational therapists supporting the mental health needs of children and youth and the profession's alignment with the Ministry of Education's initiatives to support student mental health. This is forwarded to support our request for Ministry support to ensure that occupational therapists be identified amongst the complement of mental health professionals that school boards may engage on school mental health teams.

Occupational therapists are regulated health professionals and recognized as mental health professionals^{1,2} in provincial legislation. Occupational therapists are skilled members of interdisciplinary mental health teams providing mental health services for children and youth in community and health care settings. Further, occupational therapists fill a valuable role in supporting the mental health of children and youth³ utilizing evidence-based interventions to support mental health⁴. A systematic review of occupational therapy interventions demonstrated strong evidence for the effectiveness of occupation and activity based interventions in many areas, including programs that focus on social-emotional learning, school-wide bullying prevention, and stress management activities. Evidence of the effectiveness of social skills programs is strong for children requiring individualized services (e.g. those with autism, mental illness, serious behaviour disorders) to improve social behaviour and self-management.

In reviewing the School Mental Health Ontario's website (<https://smho-smso.ca>), we note that occupational therapists' professional skills align well with the goals of School Mental Health

Ontario and can contribute meaningfully to the four principles identified for school mental health services in Ontario. Additionally, occupational therapists are familiar with tiered supports and are able to engage at all levels of the Aligned and Integrated Model (AIM). Occupational therapists are able to:

- Support a strong foundation with education and support to school staff,
- Enable early intervention to create mentally healthy classrooms and schools, and
- Directly intervene to support students' mental health and well-being.

The potential for occupational therapy in school mental health teams is highlighted with two examples of tools developed by occupational therapists to support at the foundation level of the AIM:

- Every Moment Counts (<https://everymomentcounts.org>) and,
- Zones of Regulation (<https://www.zonesofregulation.com/index.html>)

Both of these resources have been introduced in several Ontario schools. For more information about the role of occupational therapy and mental health, please refer to the attached infographic, "*Occupational Therapy: School-based Mental Health*" and available via this link. http://www.osot.on.ca/docs/Promotional_Resources/OT_School-Based_Mental_Health_2020.pdf

We respectfully submit that the Ministry of Education expand the pool of mental health professionals available to school boards and request that future communications to school boards include "occupational therapist" in the complement of regulated mental health professionals appropriate for inclusion on school mental health teams.

School mental health teams would be stronger and more effective in meeting the diverse mental health needs of the children and youth with the inclusion of occupational therapists. It is our assertion that interprofessional teams bring diverse perspectives and evidence informed approaches that enrich services available to students.

We appreciate the ongoing opportunity to discuss the role of occupational therapy in providing mental health supports to children and youth in schools. Please feel free to contact us at any time to clarify any of the points of discussion in this letter or from our virtual meetings. We look forward to the opportunity to work together to better meet the mental health needs of students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christie Brenchley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping flourish at the end of the name.

Christie Brenchley, OT Reg. (Ont.)
Executive Director

c.c. Anne Sealey, Manager Program Policy and Coordinated Services Unit

References

1. [Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991](#), S.O.1991, C.18 .
2. [Occupational Therapy Act, 1991](#), S.O. 1991, c. 33 - note scope of practice and authority for controlled act of psychotherapy Section 3 and 3.1
3. Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists. (2008) *Position Statement: Occupational Therapy and Mental Health Care*.
https://www.caot.ca/document/6127/PS_MentalHealthCare_2017.pdf
4. Marian Arbesman, Susan Bazyk, Susan M. Nochajski. (2013). Systematic Review of Occupational Therapy and Mental Health Promotion, Prevention, and Intervention for Children and Youth. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 67(6), 120–e130.
<https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2013.008359>



110 Sheppard Ave. E., Suite 810
Toronto, ON M2N 6Y8
416-322-3011

www.osot.on.ca - osot@osot.on.ca