

OTs Contribution to Community-Based Instruction

In collaboration with intervention specialists, occupational therapists play a significant role in addressing IEP goals for students participating in community-based instruction. By accompanying students on community trips and vocational opportunities, OTs use their task-analysis skills to break down learning activities to essential components, matching them with the skills needed to complete the task. Having an existing knowledge of the student's skills helps OTs pinpoint the challenging aspects of the activity and the reasons why the student is having difficulty. Once the task analysis is complete, the OT identifies environmental or material adaptations for the student, and incorporates interventions into therapy sessions or classroom activities to increase student success.

Occupational therapists from P.G. Chambers School are doing just this at both Morris Hills Regional and Hanover Park Regional where both schools have a dynamic community-based program.

Our OTs at Morris Hills Regional and Hanover Park Regional have developed a **10-Point Student Skills Checklist** that addresses the following:

1. Fine motor dexterity
2. Strength and endurance
3. Visual attention
4. Ability to cross midline and bilateral coordination
5. Visual motor skills
6. Executive functioning: problem solving and organization
7. Body awareness
8. Social skills
9. Time management
10. Sequencing

And, when it comes to developing **Strategies to Improve Independence of Students Working in Community Settings**, we value the opportunity to actually see the student perform the activity in the natural setting, as opposed to the classroom or therapy space.

Here are just a few of the strategies we've found helpful in our work within community high schools:

- Providing students with a checklist to sequence steps using words or pictures.
- Coaching staff about the prompt hierarchy.
- Demonstrating how to break down a large activity to smaller steps for increased success.
- Modifying tasks.
- Modeling the end product, so students can follow a visual example.
- Addressing student self-care and hygiene needs.
- Modeling social interactions with other staff and community members.
- Attending to concerns with feeding skills during mealtime or snack while at the community site.

Playing a role in preparing students for transition has been most rewarding, and we thank our community partner schools for this opportunity.