

Functional Mobility in the Educational Environment

Enabling Students with Physical Disabilities to Successfully Access their School Environment

“The functional activities common to every school day are taken for granted by many of us. The physically-challenged child can afford no such luxury. He must overcome obstacles at every turn, perform these skills under time pressures and deal with other distracting conditions such as noise and competition from peers.”

Physical Therapy in Public Schools: A Related Service Volume 1

Ultimate Goal of Mobility in the Educational Setting:

move from one educational environment to another in the same amount of time as non-disabled peers with the least amount of assistance necessary working towards independence.

Mobility Expectations:

- **Classroom** – a child in a pre-school classroom may crawl from one point to another and then pull up to the standing or sitting position. By the time a child reaches elementary school he/she is expected to walk or use assistive devices (walker, crutches, or wheelchair) to move about in the classroom.
- **Hallway** – just as non-disabled students are expected to travel on the right hand side of the hallway, transition in crowded hallways, stop and start in line, transition over a variety of floor surfaces, enter through doorways, and keep pace; so are students with physical disabilities.

Achieving Functional Mobility & Maximizing Classroom Time - Questions to Consider:

- Is the selected method of travel so **time consuming** that student is missing curricular activities?
- Is selected method of travel so **energy consuming** that student is too fatigued to participate in curricular activities?

Strategies to Achieve Functional Mobility:

- **Adaptive Equipment:** may range from leg braces, crutches, walkers to manual or power wheelchairs.
- **Assistance:** may range from supervision/verbal cues to complete dependence on an adult.
- **Accommodations may include the following:**
 - Peer escort
 - Extended travel time (permission to leave a few minutes early or arrive a few minutes late)
 - Adult assistance
 - Different adaptive equipment for different demands (i.e. crutches in the classroom, wheelchair for long distances)
- **Classroom Location:** careful considerations during classroom selection to minimize travel distances to cafeteria, specials, and the restroom.

- **Collaboration:** between school staff, school-based physical therapist, student, and parent/guardian is crucial to enable a student to achieve optimum functional skills without compromising time spent in educational activities.