

Dear Winnipeg School Division Board Trustees,

We are writing on behalf of Occupational Therapists in Manitoba regarding the proposed 2021/22 Winnipeg School Division draft budget. The Manitoba Society of Occupational Therapists (MSOT) is the advocacy organization for Occupational Therapists in Manitoba. We are deeply concerned to see that “Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy Services” are on the list of possible reduction in services and budget cuts.

The role of Occupational Therapists in schools includes supporting student and staff safety through proactive emotional regulation and behavioural strategies. Occupational therapists also support school teams with tools and strategies for students to build inclusivity, safety and ensuring students are ready to learn which enhances educational outcomes.

In schools, **Occupational Therapists are involved to ensure that students are able to participate in all school activities**—from paying attention in class; concentrating on the task at hand; holding a pencil, musical instrument, or book; self-regulation; independence; social thinking; fine motor skills & printing; and understanding and supporting proactive behaviour supports to keep classrooms safe. **The purpose of school-based occupational therapy is to help kids succeed in school.**

Occupational therapists don't just focus on the specific problem that a child's disability may present; rather, they **look at whole child, the individual tasks, and the environment are helping or hindering students and then work with the school teams to find ways for the child to do the things they need and want to do.**

Occupational therapists work with **any child who is having challenges in school**, not only students with identified disabilities. School-based occupational therapists work closely with school teams and educational assistants to help understand the strengths and challenges of students, the impact of the environment that may be helping or hindering a child's learning, and supporting school teams to adapt, teach or modify tasks to support the success of students.

School-based occupational therapists support can include consultation and direct support with classroom design, implementation of school-friendly attention and self-regulation strategies to support students to be engaged and ready to learn, which improves individual student growth.

Thank you for acknowledging the incredible value of Occupational Therapists working collaboratively with educational teams in the school environment to maximize the best outcomes for students, by keeping Occupational Therapy services in the Winnipeg School Division. Please feel free to connect if you would like to discuss further or have any additional questions.

Sincerely,

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