**Clarification of Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA)**

**Scope of Practice regarding “school certification” in New Jersey school districts**

In June, 2016, New Jersey Occupational Therapy Association (NJOTA) and American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) joined forces to resolve the following issue:

***Are OTA’s in NJ required to obtain school certification to provide OT services to students in NJ school districts?***

Both NJOTA & AOTA were concerned that any ambiguity relating to this issue could have unintended repercussions on OTA recruitment, job security, and adequate access to OT services by NJ students.

On August 5, 2016, delegates from NJOTA and AOTA  met in Trenton, NJ, with New Jersey Department of Education (DOE) representatives to obtain clarification on this important issue. Those attending included:

* John Worthington (Acting Director – Office of Special Education, DOE)
* Jesse Young (Legislative Liaison – Office of Legislative Affairs, DOE)
* Chuck Willmarth (Director of Health Policy and State Affairs, AOTA)
* Tracie DeSarno (Political advisor to Public Strategies Impact, NJOTA)
* Debbie Rider, OTR (Practice Chair, NJOTA)
* Miriam Manela, OTR (Legislation Co-chair, NJOTA).

DOE representatives cited DOE regulations and clarified the above mentioned “school certification” issue. A summary of this clarification follows, with citations from DOE sources added to provide further clarity:

Certification is required to qualify for certain positions in NJ schools. This requirement extends to the Occupational Therapist (OT), not the OTA. It is the OT who must obtain the “School Occupational Therapist Standard Certificate (Endorsement Code: 2910)” 2 This endorsed certificate is for the OT only, no such endorsement exists for the OTA. As such, an OTA does not and cannot obtain such certification.

Lack of such certification, therefore, does not indicate that an OTA is in any way “under‑qualified” for his or her position. On the contrary, a licensed and certified OTA is fully qualified to provide OT services in the NJ school system given that they practice within the scope of the NJ Occupational Therapy Licensure statutes and all of it's regulations, including supervision of the OTA by a properly certified Occupational Therapist (OT).

The OT and OTA(s) then work together to help NJ students reach their fullest potential. And, as guided by the objectives of the NJ “school certification” process, the OT and OTA(s) join forces “to support high levels of student learning and the future success of students as they live and work in an increasingly complex global society.” 3

Work Cited:

1, 2 "School Occupational Therapist Standard Certificate (Endorsement Code: 2910)."  The Official Website of the State of New Jersey. NJ Department of Education, n.d. Web. 16 June 2017. http://www.state.nj.us/education/ educators/license/endorsements/2910S.pdf

3 “Certification and Induction.” The Official Website of the State of New Jersey. NJ Department of Education, n.d. Web. 16 June 2017. http://www.nj.gov/education/educators/license/overview/