

Development of a Handwriting Clinic for School-Based Rehabilitation Services

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Handwriting is a necessary functional task for school-aged children. Research has indicated that children who can write well have increased confidence, self-esteem, concentration, and academic performance (1,2). Children who have not mastered basic handwriting skills in younger grades experience significant challenges with written expression as expectations increase (3,4). Technology may provide an alternative, however, research suggests that the same level of processing of information is not achieved with technology as it is with handwriting (5). Thus, it is essential for students with handwriting challenges to receive early intervention.

Over 50% of school-based occupational therapy (OT) referrals identify students with handwriting challenges. In an effort to address waitlist times, Developmental Pediatrics and Rehabilitation at McMaster Children's Hospital developed a handwriting clinic pilot program. Following assessment, two cohorts were identified: 1) children with written output challenges requiring remediation, and 2) children requiring technology for written output. Cohort 1 was enrolled in a 5-week group involving caregivers and school follow-up for generalization to the classroom setting. From further assessments, various programs were developed to group students together from cohort 1 with similar functional written output concerns. This has facilitated small group services to be provided virtually and within school environments.

Overall, the pilot program was seen as highly valuable by the school boards, educational staff, and caregivers. Remediation provided in a group setting is less resource intensive and allows students to access essential OT support earlier. Future program goals will focus on evaluating waitlist reduction times, caregiver and educator satisfaction rates, and the development of a technology specific stream for children in Cohort 2.

References

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