Occupational Therapy

The focus of Occupational Therapy is for students to be as successful in the classroom as possible and to achieve skills to become successful productive adults. There are a variety of factors that can impact a student's abilities in the classroom. Often students are referred to occupational therapy when they are struggling with handwriting, have difficulty with tracking, struggle to learn to read or have potential sensory needs. Handwriting is an academic skill that allows students to express their thoughts, feelings and communicate their knowledge to others. Classroom teachers depend on written work to measure what the children are learning and how well. Handwriting efficiency requires mastery of multiple skills, including vision, memory, posture, and body control as well as the task of holding the pencil and forming the letters. Children who fall behind classmates because of lack of some of these skills may miss learning opportunities. When a student is struggling in the classroom, occupational therapy tries to determine the cause of difficulty through a variety of evaluations.

At South Seneca, typical evaluations that are completed are as follows:

Bruininks-Oseretsky Test of Motor Proficiency
This is a standardized test for children ages 4 to 21 years. This assessment evaluates both fine and gross motor skills.

- Fine Motor Precision which consists of activities that require precise control of finger and hand movements.
- Fine Motor Integration - this incorporates fine motor precision with reproducing shapes, in addition it also measures the ability to integrate visual stimuli with motor control.
- Manual Dexterity uses goal directed activities that involve grasping, reaching and two handed coordination with small objects. These tasks are timed to look at the student's speed and level of dexterity. Speed and accuracy are important in identifying developmental coordination disorders.
- Bilateral Coordination - these tasks require body control, and sequential and simultaneous coordination of upper and lower limbs.
- Upper Limb coordination subtest measures visual tracking with coordinated arm and hand movements

The Bruininks- Osertesky also has tests which look at gross motor skills including balance, running speed, agility, and strength. These last three subtests are not as frequently completed as they look more closely at gross motor skills. On occasion, they would be completed for a student who may have a 504 plan with gross motor concerns.

Developmental Test of Visual Perception

This is a standardized assessment for children ages 4- 10 years 11 months. This assessment has 8 subtests which look at visual perceptual skills and visual motor integration skills.

- Eye hand coordination subtest measures the ability to draw precise straight or curved lines in accordance with visual boundaries.
- Position in space measures the ability to match two figures. According to common features, this is a visual discrimination task.
- Copying measures the ability to recognize the features of a design and draw it from a model. This is important with note taking both from a close environment and / or from the board.
- Figure Ground measures the ability to see specified figures even when they are hidden in confusing or complex backgrounds. Difficulty in this area may make it difficult to complete bubble answer sheets for tests, find a certain item or know where the class is reading in a text with words and multiple pictures on the page. Difficulty with figure ground perception also makes placement of letters challenging and editing written work.
- Spatial Relations is the ability to reproduce visually presented patterns and specifies how some object is located in space in relation to some reference object.
- Visual Closure is the ability to correctly perceive an object or word, even when it is partly hidden. This ability helps you to quickly make sense of what you see, even if it is not all visible to you, which means you do not have to see every little detail in order to recognize something. This often affects a student's ability to know that when letters are presented in a certain pattern such as "a r e" it forms the word "are and not ear".
- Form Constancy - the ability to match two figures that vary by one or more discriminating features, for example, size, position or shade. This ability is important for reading different style of print and letter formation, identifying symbols, shapes and angles.
- Visual Motor Speed refers to a child's ability to efficiently integrate visual and motor skills to complete a task. Often weaknesses in this skill are related to fine motor or gross motor coordination difficulties. This skill is part of the general cognitive domain of speed.

As an upper level assessment of visual perceptual skills ranging in age from 13 years to 21 years, there is the Test of Visual Perceptual skills upper level revised. It looks at similar skills as the Developmental Test of Visual Perception.

Sensory Processing Profile or Sensory Processing Measure

These are two different checklist/ rating scales that are completed by parents and classroom teacher to look at the child's ability to process various sensory information.

- General Sensory processing, measures the person's broad sensory processing abilities.
- Auditory processing, the person's response to things heard, are they distracted when there is a lot of noise present?
- Visual processing, response to things seen. Do they leave items blank on a busy worksheet even when they know the answers?
- Somatosensory (touch processing), measures the person's response to stimuli that touch the skin. Do they resist getting clothing on, hate having hair washed, intolerant of messy hands?
- Vestibular (movement) processing, measures the person's response to movement. Do they lose their balance, unexpectedly fall?
- Proprioceptive (body position) processing, this measures the person's response to changes in joint and muscle position. Do they become tired easily, especially when standing or holding the body in one position? Do they lay their head on the desk when working?
- Oral Sensory processing, measures the response to touch and taste in the mouth. Do they enjoy making noises? Are they picky eaters?

Sensory processing measures also provide information on the person's social emotional responses to the sensory environment and attentional issues. Do they jump from one thing to another to interfere with activities or being with others?

Assistive Technology

With more students having access to school provided Chromebooks, there has been a focus on identifying applications and extensions that help the student complete their classroom activities. In addition to evaluating for these extensions, it also includes training of staff and students in the use of the different assistive technology pieces. Sometimes the assistive technology is not related to computers but use of simple things like a pencil gripper for a student with weak intrinsic muscles. Use of alternative seating for the wiggly student or use of a weighted vest for the student that needs more proprioceptive input to increase attention in the classroom. These assessments are different than the ones above in that they are not standardized but more observation based and exploratory.