The goal of education is to prepare all children for adult life. The role of the physical therapist in the educational setting is to assist children with disabilities to attain this goal. Children fulfill many roles—that of son/daughter, sibling, friend, student, and worker. Their jobs are to play, learn, and work. Their work sites include home, day care, parks, stores, shopping centers, job sites, and school. The physical therapist working with these children is not only a pediatric therapist, but also an industrial therapist. The physical therapist’s primary purpose is to assist children with disabilities to function at their “work.”

The purpose of public education is to provide a free and appropriate education for all children. Federal and state laws and regulations establish minimum standards for general education and special education. It is a challenge to provide an education that will prepare children with disabilities for their adult life. This challenge is significant in that the percentage of youth with disabilities who have not graduated from high school (20% vs 9%)\(^1\), percentage of youth who pursue postsecondary education in the first 2 years following graduation (19% vs 56%)\(^2\) and the percentage of adults with disabilities who work (29% vs 79%)\(^1\) is significantly less than that of youth and adults without disabilities. Many children with disabilities complete their high school program with a certificate of completion vs a diploma, making it more difficult for them to pursue competitive employment.\(^3\)\(^-\)\(^5\) Children with disabilities not only need to attain the ability to complete academic components of education but also the functional skills necessary for post-secondary education, jobs and job training, independent living, and social competence for adult life.\(^3\)\(^-\)\(^6\)

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the role of the physical therapist in the educational environment. Aspects of federal laws most pertinent to the school physical therapist will be highlighted. Types of physical therapy services in the educational environment and the roles and functions of the school physical therapist will be discussed. Special emphasis will be placed on the relevance of physical therapy services to educational goals in light of professional standards and evidence-based practice. The chapter will conclude by addressing the role of the physical therapist in an educational environment for children in the case studies.

Education Laws

Education laws are the bases for the provision of services for children with disabilities in public schools. To understand the role and function of the physical therapist in an educational setting, we must understand the contents and implications of the laws. We also must understand the history of educational law, interaction between federal and state