



University of St Augustine for Health Sciences  
SOAR @ USA

---

Spring 2023 Virtual OTD Capstone Symposium

OTD Capstone Symposia

---

Spring 5-9-2023

## Occupational Therapy's Role in Mealtime Participation in Schools

Jaidee Mae Reyes

*University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences, j.reyes4@usa.edu*

Karen Park

*University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences, kpark@usa.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://soar.usa.edu/otdcapstonesspring2023>



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Occupational Therapy Commons](#), and the [Special Education and Teaching Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Reyes, J., & Park, K. (2023, May 9). Occupational Therapy's Role in Mealtime Participation in Schools. Poster presented at the Virtual OTD Capstone Symposium, University of St Augustine for Health Sciences. Retrieved from <https://soar.usa.edu/otdcapstonesspring2023/7>

This Poster/presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the OTD Capstone Symposia at SOAR @ USA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spring 2023 Virtual OTD Capstone Symposium by an authorized administrator of SOAR @ USA. For more information, please contact [soar@usa.edu](mailto:soar@usa.edu), [erobinson@usa.edu](mailto:erobinson@usa.edu).

# Occupational Therapy's Role in Mealtime Participation in Schools

Jaidee Mae Reyes, OTS; Dr. Karen Park, OTD, OTR/L, BCP

## BACKGROUND

School mealtimes encompass several occupations (AOTA, 2020). Occupational therapy practitioners (OTPs) can increase mealtime participation (MP) by addressing physical, cognitive, emotional, or social barriers. Schools have a role in determining supports needed to ensure that a child is given access to safe mealtime experiences (California Department of Education, 2012). OTPs may experience barriers as MP is not directly related to the educational curriculum and other school professionals remain unsure of the full scope of OT practice (Benson et al., 2016; Cahill & Egan, 2017; Cahill & Lopez-Reyna, 2013; Minard, 2018).

## PURPOSE

To explore if and how OTPs provide services to increase MP in school-based settings and OTP's perceptions, attitudes, and experiences in addressing mealtime in schools.

## METHODS

A mixed-methods research design was used to explore OTPs' current role and their thoughts on addressing mealtime in schools.

**Research Question.** How do school-based OTPs in the state of California address mealtime participation in elementary schools and what are their perceptions, attitudes, and experiences with providing services related to this area?

**Recruitment.** Social media, Occupational Therapy Association of California, personal connections, and snowball sampling

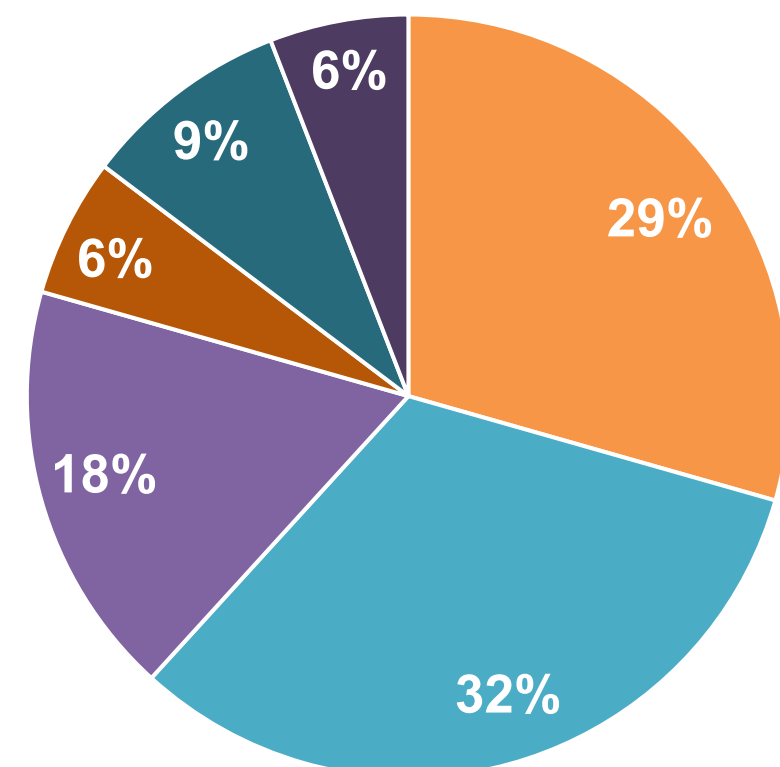
**Participants.** OTPs with elementary school experience in California

- Survey Participants: 34
- Interview Participants: 3

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at USAHS, IRB Approval #OTD-1201-063

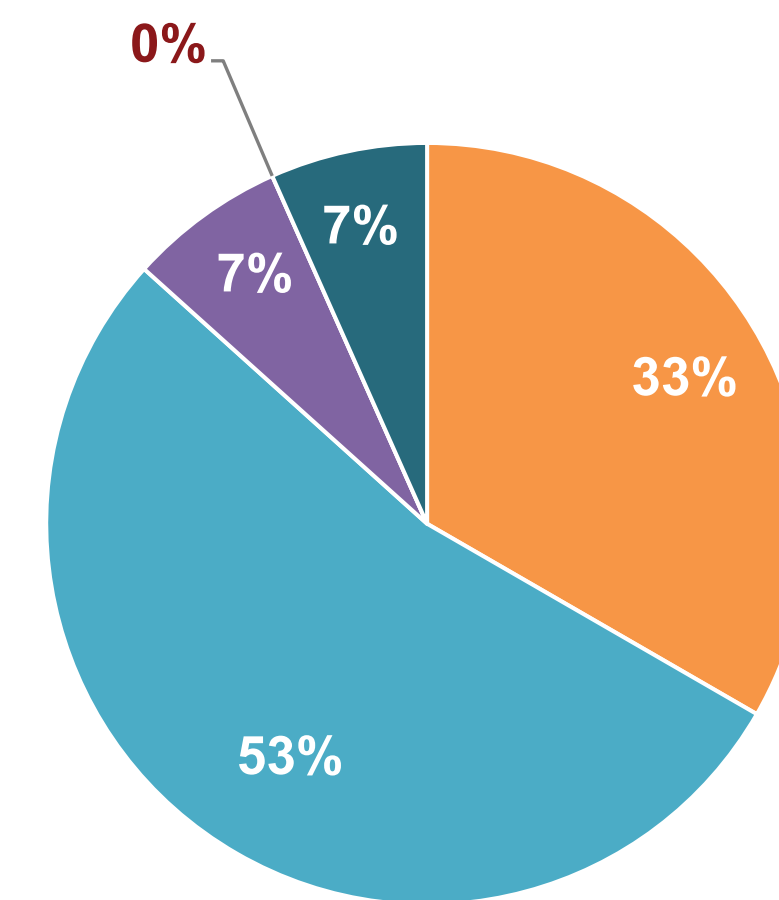
## QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

What aspect of school mealtime participation do you feel is most important to address?



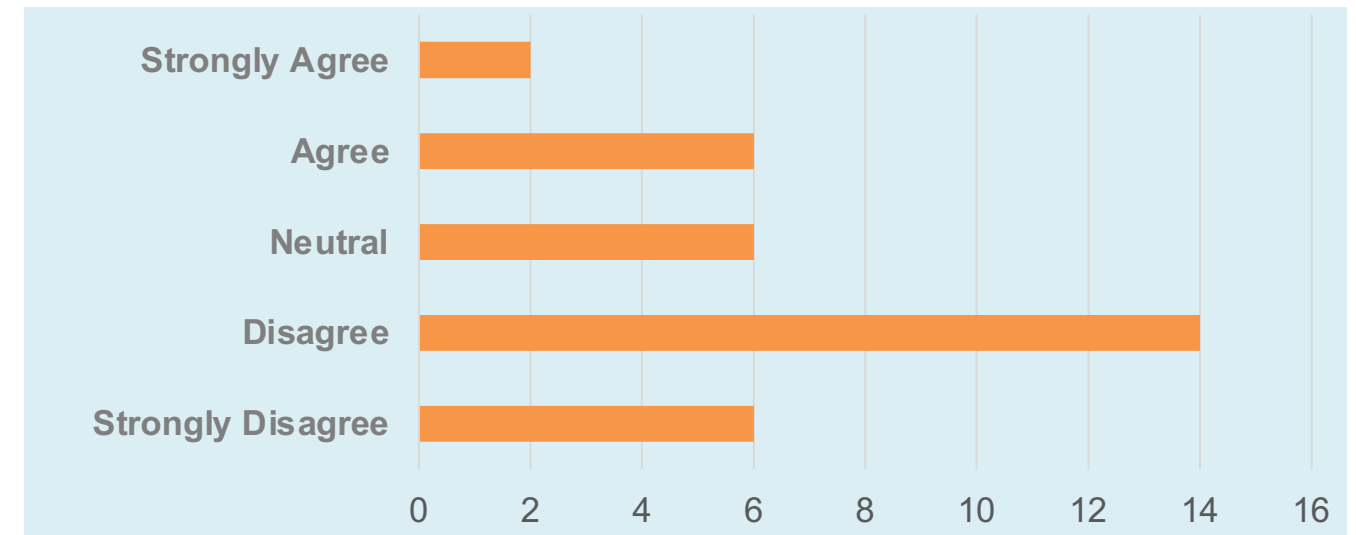
- Sensory Environment
- Motor Skills
- Socialization
- Physical Environment
- All of the Above
- Depends

Methods Utilized for Non-Academic Occupations



- Teacher/Staff Report
- Direct Observation
- Parent Report
- Clinical Judgement
- All of the Above

I have enough time to create goals and provide interventions that address skills relating to MP.



Agree or Disagree? (5-point scale)	Mean (SD)
Goals and interventions relating to mealtime participation relate to the student's education.	3.88 (0.96)
I feel confident in providing interventions to increase mealtime participation.	3.91 (0.71)
I have enough time to create goals and provide interventions that address skills relating to mealtime participation.	2.53 (1.16)

## QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Themes	Subthemes	Quotes
Inhibiting and supporting contextual factors	<b>Inhibiting Factors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited time</li> <li>• High caseload</li> <li>• Poor carry-over</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Lack of time to spend adequate time during mealtime. With a caseload of 70 I just don't have the time to target mealtime participation for all my students"</li> <li>• "Some teachers/aides don't follow through recommendations [sic], impacting learning opportunities for students."</li> <li>• "I work in county special education classes where all are encouraged to work on functional life skills."</li> </ul>
	<b>Supporting Factors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff relationships</li> <li>• County Programs</li> </ul>	
Admin/OT culture and interpretation of educational relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admin support</li> <li>• Academic vs. medical model</li> <li>• Idea that MP is not educationally relevant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "[...] we're lucky, and that, we've been able to address it. I know that not every district or administration is as open to that. [...] Some of them also have pretty different ideas on what is considered educationally relevant versus what might not be. And what is within the purview of therapists in a school-based setting versus therapist in a private setting."</li> </ul>
Decision-making process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Least restrictive environment</li> <li>• Mealtime FM skills vs. educational FM skills</li> <li>• Using time effectively</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "It would be challenging to determine when a mealtime participation goal would be more important than a fine motor goal/goals."</li> <li>• "[...] being able to manage the time to work on all areas if there are more concerns than feeding/eating skills, while keeping everything "least restrictive" and not disrupting the student's mealtime with peers."</li> </ul>

## DISCUSSION

Although OTPs feel confident in addressing MP, contextual factors can affect the likelihood of providing MP interventions. Since school districts differ across the state and school professionals have different interpretations of educational relevance, OTPs' feel mixed levels of support in addressing MP and urgency in addressing MP.

## CONCLUSION

The research project helped to understand OTPs' experiences and their thoughts on the provision of MP services. OTPs face various factors that can affect their involvement in MP. Future research is needed on school system culture and perceived authority and its impact on OT's scope of practice.

## REFERENCES



Acknowledgements: Special thanks to Deborah Kempston, OTR/L