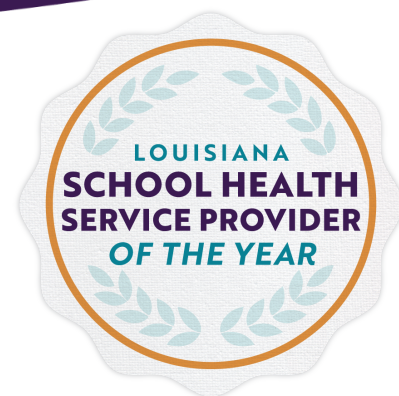




Sample Application

School Health Service Provider of the Year

BIO:

Sue Lyn Simpson is a highly experienced physical therapist with over 25 years of service in Louisiana's school systems. Since transitioning to school-based therapy in 1999, she has served multiple parishes, including Lafourche, St. Charles, Assumption, St. James, and Ascension. Her clinical background spans acute care, rehabilitation, home health, and pediatrics, giving her a comprehensive foundation in treating students with diverse and complex needs.

Sue Lyn specializes in wheelchair seating and positioning, orthotic management, adaptive equipment, mobility enhancement, and transportation safety for students with significant physical disabilities. She is recognized statewide for her leadership in supporting medically fragile students, preventing orthopedic deformities, promoting mobility and strength, and ensuring safe and accessible school environments. Her advocacy extends beyond the classroom, helping families secure essential medical equipment and services, often overcoming financial and logistical barriers.

Sue Lyn has authored and co-authored multiple sections of the Louisiana Department of Education's OT/PT Guidelines, including the related document entitled "*Special Transportation and Evacuation in Louisiana Schools*" and the sections of the Guidelines entitled "*Skilled Intervention*," "*Equipment Management System*," and protocols for "*Atypical Evacuations*" and "*Assistive Technology*." She regularly presents at state conferences and trains educators, therapists, and transportation staff in student handling, bus safety, and emergency evacuation procedures.

Deeply collaborative, Sue Lyn works closely with OT, speech, and assistive technology professionals to support integrated services and student-centered care. Her work consistently bridges gaps between school and home, empowering students with disabilities to thrive physically, socially, and academically.

Sue Lyn's career reflects a tireless commitment to inclusive education, health equity, and the belief that every child deserves the tools and support to succeed.

WRITTEN REFLECTION QUESTIONS: In 500 words or less, respond to each of the following writing prompts.

1. **Knowledge and expertise in the field:** Briefly describe your experience and journey to providing health services in the educational setting.

I graduated from LSU Medical Center in New Orleans in 1994 with a Bachelor's degree in Physical Therapy. Over the first five years of my career, I gained extensive experience in a variety of clinical settings, including inpatient acute care, outpatient therapy, inpatient rehabilitation, and home health. This diverse background helped me build a strong foundation of clinical skills.

In 1999, I transitioned into the school setting, accepting a full-time position that split my time between the Lafourche and St. Charles Parish school systems. Over the years, I transitioned to working in Assumption Parish, then St. James Parish, and have been proudly serving Ascension Parish Schools since 2008.

My specialized areas of expertise include:

Advanced clinical treatment in balance, mobility, strength, flexibility, and functional limitations.

Selection, ordering, and use of adaptive equipment, with a focus on resource management through a comprehensive tracking system.

Wheelchair seating and positioning with an emphasis on students with significant orthopedic deformities and postural challenges.

Orthotic selection and management, including fit assessment, casting, and foot biomechanics to ensure optimal orthotic fit and function.

2. Advocates for student health: Describe the ways you advocate for student health both in and out of school.

I have advocated for student health both within the school environment and at home through a variety of strategies aimed at promoting physical well-being. One key area of focus has been the prevention of skin breakdown and the management of orthopedic deformities for students with severe mobility impairments. To address these challenges, I implemented positioning schedules that ensured students were regularly repositioned throughout the school day. I also conducted staff training on the proper handling and positioning of students in a range of adaptive equipment, developing expertise in assessing, selecting, and modifying various positioning devices.

Additionally, I have supported families in obtaining adaptive equipment for home use. By conducting assessments at school in collaboration with equipment vendors, I helped families obtain access to wheelchairs, walkers, gait trainers, adaptive chairs, bath chairs, and toileting systems. For families facing financial or insurance barriers, I leveraged a robust network of resources to acquire donated equipment, ensuring that all students had the necessary tools for optimal health and mobility.

Over the years, I have honed my skills in wheelchair seating and positioning through close partnerships with highly skilled providers. This experience has allowed me to swiftly identify and address musculoskeletal deformities by recommending custom wheelchair seating systems. Careful attention to wheelchair positioning, particularly ensuring midline alignment, has proven to be highly effective in preventing the progression of scoliosis, a condition that can lead to severe complications such as organ compromise and even death.

My work has also focused on maximizing the mobility of students with physical disabilities throughout the school day by promoting opportunities for weight-bearing, cardiovascular conditioning, strength-building, and flexibility. I conducted assessments across the school campus to identify the best times and spaces for students to work on walking skills. Based on these evaluations, I made recommendations and facilitated the provision of adaptive equipment, including walkers, standers, gait trainers, and mobile standers, ensuring that students had the necessary tools to address their mobility impairments.

In addition, I addressed accessibility challenges on campus by advocating for the installation of ramps and other wheelchair-accessible accommodations, enabling students to fully participate in school activities. I also selected and ordered adaptive playground equipment to encourage physical activity, ensuring that all students, regardless of their mobility limitations, could enjoy the same opportunities as their peers.

Beyond the school setting, I have worked with many families to secure adaptive bicycles for home use, further promoting physical health through strengthening, cardiovascular exercise, and improved gait quality. I referred families to charitable organizations that provide bicycles and conducted assessments to ensure that each bike was tailored to the student's needs. For families who did not qualify for donated bikes, I helped them find low-cost alternatives through local bike shops. I made recommendations for necessary adaptations, including seating, trunk support, gearing specifications, and additional attachments like oversized training wheels and foot pedal modifications. These solutions allowed many families to access affordable options that supported their children's mobility and health.

Through these efforts, I have positively impacted the health and well-being of students both in school and at home, ensuring they have the tools and resources necessary to thrive physically and engage fully in daily activities.

3. Professional growth: How have you taken on leadership to develop professional growth in your field?

I have completed extensive continuing education focused on school-based therapy and pediatric treatment, including specialized training in the management of conditions such as Down Syndrome, spina bifida, cerebral palsy, and Movement Opportunities Via Education (M.O.V.E.). My expertise also includes pediatric seating and positioning, the School Function Assessment, and workshops from the Louisiana Department of Education on Physical and Occupational Therapy services in schools. I hold a certification in Advanced Assistive Technology Applications and have advanced knowledge in gait analysis, reflex integration, foot biomechanics, and orthotic selection and management. Additionally, I am trained in the safe transportation of students with physical disabilities.

This past summer, I had the opportunity to present on school-based Physical Therapy services at the Louisiana Special Education Administrators Conference in New Orleans.

I contributed my expertise in the development of the upcoming Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) OT/PT guidelines, set for release this spring. Specifically, I wrote the Transportation, Equipment Management, and APTA Guidelines sections, and co-authored the Atypical/Multi-Level Evacuation, Skilled Intervention, and Assistive Technology sections. My primary motivation for contributing to these guidelines was to address misconceptions within the field of school-based PT in Louisiana, in particular, the belief that school physical therapists should not be involved in assisting with personal equipment, bracing, or transportation needs. These tasks are often considered "clinical" or solely the responsibility of transportation services. Through this work, I aim to empower school-based PTs to leverage their full range of skills and expertise, ensuring students with special needs receive the best possible care, safety, and functional support both at school and in their home environments.

4. **Health program:** How have you worked within your educational setting to eliminate or narrow barriers to healthcare and to increase access to healthcare?

Throughout my career, I have worked in districts with large populations of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Many of these students faced significant barriers, including a lack of transportation and limited access to healthcare resources.

To address these challenges, I developed a comprehensive resource network, which included the contact information for the Director of Medicaid Transportation Services. This network allowed me to assist students, particularly those living in rural areas, in obtaining transportation to see specialist physicians for orthopedic care.

I have also advocated on behalf of numerous families, helping them secure waiver services and Medicaid coverage. By collaborating with Capitol Area Waiver staff, I worked to ensure that my students received the superior healthcare, equipment, and bracing they needed to succeed.

Building strong relationships with wheelchair vendors in the districts I served, I facilitated on-site evaluations to assess students' equipment needs. This proactive approach maximized their participation in both school and home environments.

Similarly, I formed strong partnerships with local orthotists, arranging for them to visit schools to evaluate and fit students for orthotics. This on-site access was especially beneficial for students who lacked the means to travel to an orthotist's clinic.

For my students with severe disabilities who had aged out of the school setting and who were homebound with significant transportation challenges, I extended my support by offering after-hours services. I assisted students in their homes with assessments for wheelchair repairs, modifications, new wheelchairs, and adaptive equipment, ensuring they had the mobility and comfort they needed.

In addition to my clinical work, I became proficient in making wheelchair seating adjustments and performing basic wheelchair repairs. These skills allowed me to properly position students in donated wheelchairs and keep my students' wheelchairs in safe working condition when resources were scarce.

I prioritize working closely with parents to educate them on the specific services their children need to address orthopedic concerns. I assist them with referrals and collaborate on home programs to support the transfer of mobility skills from school to home. By earning the trust of parents, I have seen significant improvements in both health and function as a result of their following my recommendations.

For families unable to afford orthotics, I refer them to low-cost alternatives such as orthopedic shoes and arch supports. In cases where families were unable to cover the costs of medical equipment, I personally purchased orthopedic shoes, orthotics, and braces to support home and school programs.

4a) Describe your work to grow the health program at your school/district.

For decades, I have been at the forefront of addressing transportation challenges and ensuring the safety of students with physical disabilities on school buses. I have worked closely with transportation departments to equip and train staff in the proper methods for positioning and securing students with physical disabilities. My efforts have also focused on providing comprehensive training on how to safely assist students on and off the bus, as well as evacuating them in case of an emergency.

Evacuation training includes instructions on how to transfer students with severe mobility impairments out of their wheelchairs, safely carry them, or use drag blankets to move them to a designated exit, ensuring they are transferred to a safe location. It has been gratifying to witness the relief and confidence evident in bus staff after they successfully lift and move students with proper training and practice. Historically, training on how to evacuate students with significant mobility impairments has not been a standard practice across the state, leaving many drivers and aides uncertain of their ability to safely evacuate students in an emergency.

To address these challenges, I recently developed an Individual Transportation Plan (ITP) that can be shared across relevant disciplines for collaborative input. The ITP outlines each student's unique transportation needs, including supervision, behavior plans, child safety restraint systems, and specific protocols for safe evacuation from the bus. The ITP has been shared with school therapists across the state via a link in the new OT/PT Guidelines from the Louisiana Department of Education.

In addition, I created a decision-making protocol for when safety vests are necessary on the bus, particularly for use in addressing behavioral concerns. This protocol clarifies the roles and responsibilities of transportation staff, behavior teams, and PT/OT professionals, fostering a collaborative approach to student safety.

To further streamline our efforts, I developed an Equipment Management Tracking System to monitor all therapy and adaptive equipment within the district. By utilizing the district's library tracking system, each piece of adaptive equipment is labeled, logged, and checked out to the appropriate school. I also introduced a phone app that allows therapists to easily search for and track equipment, reducing redundancy in orders and promoting cost savings.

Additionally, I have provided training at paraprofessional and special education bus driver workshops, focusing on body mechanics, lifting techniques, and protocols for transporting and evacuating students with special needs. I have also advocated for transportation training experts to conduct specialized training sessions for both therapy and transportation staff, ensuring our team is well-equipped to meet the needs of our students.

5. **Represent their profession:** How do you connect with other healthcare providers throughout your district and state to communicate as a representative of your healthcare community?

I have worked closely with speech therapists and assistive technology teams to maximize communication opportunities for students with severe physical impairments. This collaboration involves using advanced technology, like integrating mouse emulation via the joystick of a power wheelchair, to facilitate access to communication devices. My expertise in this area contributed to co-authoring the Assistive Technology section of the new guidelines.

To support integrated IEP goals, I engage in co-treatment sessions with other disciplines as needed. Collaboration with my students' private physical therapists is also vital, as it allows me to adopt innovative techniques and incorporate newly acquired skills from private therapy into the students' school routines. Additionally, we work together to assess and address equipment needs as they arise. I also coordinate with case managers to ensure therapy needs are met for students in foster care.

My expertise has been sought out by colleagues and other therapists across the state for guidance on resolving complex transportation challenges. Furthermore, I have collaborated with physical therapists statewide to share strategies and best practices for addressing transportation and evacuation concerns in school settings.

Provide any links to websites that are a demonstration of your work.

Below are the links to the documents I authored for the LDOE OT/PT Guidelines, which will be published on the LDOE website in the spring. The Transportation section and Individual Transportation Plan will also be attached to Bulletin 119:

(Listed below are rough drafts of each section that were originally submitted. Please see the link below for the completed document:)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PgcbP4lxjQJ1y60JzfJTMOnRsJl778NgB0XDu5MuVCI/edit?usp=sharing>

Sole author of the following:

Individual Transportation Plan-

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1N8aZYplQiVUUBzjbd-6OJCtsK-yp2jke5GRXIBs4w0/edit?usp=sharing>

Safety Vest Procedure-

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hybJDVpK37Ax3jTCNPydsvJpPIYfmPRa/edit?usp=sharing&oid=105301090080004933947&rtpof=true&sd=true>

APTA Guide Service Delivery-

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vdhgabd75uQ6oSm9L73liKQ_hjTdSFZXVueulJeWNig/edit?usp=sharing

Equipment Management

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BfS5TS17eMYlpEzyDyBhtQowTsy9KkzhPdr16p7ixsg/edit?usp=sharing>

Primary author of the below sections:

Transportation (Author of entire document with the exception of the introduction)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KE40BF1eJt7TpGRo8lKfb-EiEjTlgNHQf6WsTnUURKc/edit?usp=sharing>

Skilled Intervention (Author of document with the exception of the introduction and the OT interventions section)

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1apl_GN6OibhvFlvURLODjfTD-vPKspQi_Z1T4GtYrGE/edit?usp=sharing

Co-Authored and Graphics on below Sections:

Role in Emergency Planning: Atypical Evacuations-

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WhiZPp5WBPOgU0ogBjTZrlzYXCqBl4qK/edit?usp=sharing&oid=105301090080004933947&rtpof=true&sd=true>

Assistive Technology-

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KcaucSVyVJ_sbUcv6ZVA76nKFxgBTl48qjKzdnJKHfc/edit?usp=sharing