

Fit and Healthy for Life: Physical Education for Students With Disabilities

Physical Education must be made available equally to children with disabilities and without disabilities.



Since 1975, physical education has been a component of the definition of special education. The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 identifies physical education as a component of special education for students ages 3-21.

Physical education is defined as the development of:

- Physical and motor fitness;
- Fundamental motor skills and patterns;
- Skills in aquatics, dance, and individual and group games and sports, including intramurals and lifetime sports; and,
- Special physical education, adapted physical education, movement education, and motor development .

Adapted Physical Education (APE) Defined

All students who receive special education must participate in physical education to the same extent that their nondisabled peers must participate in physical education.

Adapted physical education (APE) is physical education that has been adapted or modified to meet the needs of the individual student. APE can take place in a variety of settings, from the general physical education class

through a continuum of services and placements, including a one-to-one, student-to-teacher setting. APE is based on assessment and is specially designed to meet the identified needs of the student. Goals and objectives in adapted physical education should reflect the Pennsylvania Core Standards for Health, Safety, and Physical Education.

APE is a direct service, like reading or math. The adapted physical educator is a direct service provider, not a related service provider, like a physical or occupational therapist.

The law further states that each child with a disability must be afforded the opportunity to participate in the general physical education program available to students without disabilities unless:

- The child is enrolled full time in a separate facility; or
- The child needs specially designed physical education, as prescribed in the child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) by the IEP team.

IDEA states, "The state educational agency has established and maintains qualifications to ensure that personnel necessary to carry out this part are appropriately and adequately prepared and trained, including that those personnel have the content knowledge and skills to serve students with disabilities" [(Part B-State Eligibility)(612)(14)(A)].

Qualifications for Adapted Physical Educators

All students who qualify for special education services under IDEA have a right to instruction in physical education. A teacher who holds a valid credential in physical education is qualified to teach APE in Pennsylvania.

Ideally, physical education teachers should have content knowledge in:

- Disability
- Assessment methods for service qualification and instructional design
- Development of individualized education programs (IEPs)
- Adaptations and modifications for physical education
- Behavior management
- Individual teaching
- Collaboration and consultation skills
- Inclusion practices
- Instructional design and planning
- Community and family resources
- Assistive technology for physical education

Student Eligibility for Adapted Physical Education

Students are eligible to receive adapted physical education when they meet the criteria of being a student with one of the 13 disabilities listed in IDEA and require specially designed instruction (SDI) in health and physical education. In addition, adapted physical education must be recommended by the student's IEP team.

Students With Individualized Education Programs

An IEP is required for all students who are enrolled in special education. Adapted physical education services should be determined through an evaluation process. This may include assessments of physical fitness, motor development, and motor performance. For any student receiving APE, IEP annual goals are developed at the annual IEP meeting.

According to IDEA § 300.108, Physical Education, the state must ensure that public agencies in the state comply with the following:

- (a) General. Physical education services, specially designed if necessary, must be made available to every child with a disability receiving free, appropriate, public education (FAPE), unless the public agency enrolls children without disabilities and does not provide physical education to children without disabilities in the same grades.
- (b) Regular physical education. Each child with a disability must be afforded the opportunity to participate in the regular physical education program available to nondisabled children unless:
 - (1) The child is enrolled full time in a separate facility; or
 - (2) The child needs specially designed physical education, as prescribed in the child's IEP.
- (c) Special physical education. If specially designed physical education is prescribed in a child's IEP, the public agency responsible for the education of that child must provide the services directly or make arrangements for those services to be provided through other public or private programs.
- (d) Education in separate facilities. The public agency responsible for the education of a child with a disability who is enrolled in a separate facility must ensure that the child receives appropriate physical education services in compliance with this section.

(Approved by the Office of Management and Budget under control number 1820-0030)(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(5)(A))

The Eligibility Process

Referral

Typically, the student is referred for an adapted physical education evaluation under one of the following conditions:

- The student is being evaluated or reevaluated for special education services
- The student who already receives special education services is referred by a team member, including but not limited to the general physical education teacher, the parents, the special or general education teacher, a physical or occupational therapist

Evaluation

Evaluation is one factor that determines whether the general physical education class is the appropriate learning environment, or whether additional services or alternative settings are needed. Evaluation provides a baseline for the present level of performance when writing annual goals.

Questions may include:

- What are the skills and activities that are life-long, transfer to post-school life, and will contribute to the health and wellness of the student?
- What are the skills and activities that are grade and age appropriate and would allow for the student to be more successful in community-based activities, sports, and games?
- What are the family's goals, wants, needs, and hopes for the student?
- What are the student's goals, wants, needs, and hopes?

The evaluation process may include:

- Observation of the student by a physical education teacher across various environments
- Completion of a questionnaire by family and student about wants, needs, and goals
- Review of medical and educational information as provided in the student's records
- Selection of test(s) and test items (e.g., fitness, motor skills, sport skills, use of fitness equipment, swimming, teacher-made tests, grading rubrics used in the general physical education class, curriculum based assessment items, standardized tests)
- Analysis of the data; summary and recommendations to include in the evaluation report and, if applicable, the IEP or 504 Plan.

Supports for Students

Supports for students in physical education may include the following:

- A physical education teacher working with the student within the general physical education class
- A paraprofessional assisting the physical education teacher working within the physical education environment

- Adaptive equipment
- Trained peer buddies
- Modification of activities
- Preteaching skills and concepts
- Use of a schedule
- Use of pictures or communication device as used in all other environments
- Other supports as determined by the IEP team to meet the individual needs of the student

Progress Monitoring

As with other direct services, progress must be monitored toward measurable annual goals and reported to parents.

Students With 504 Service Agreements

A service agreement is required for all students who meet Section 504 criteria. The service agreement will specify how adapted physical education is to be provided. A student may have a physician's prescription for adapted physical education due to a temporary health-related condition.

Working With Paraprofessionals in Physical Education

Paraprofessionals play an important role in the education of students with disabilities. It is important for physical education teachers to know how to properly interact with and utilize paraprofessionals to create the best possible learning environment for students with disabilities in physical education.

Physical education teachers should establish clearly defined expectations and procedures for paraprofessionals to follow before, during, and after class. Before class, physical education teachers should communicate with paraprofessionals to discuss the student's disability, share IEP goals, and discuss the paraprofessional's duties during class time. During class, the paraprofessional's specific duties may vary depending on a number of different factors. Some basic duties during a typical physical education class may include assisting with equipment, monitoring safety, assisting with behavior

management, and instructing in small group or one-on-one situations under the direction of the certified physical educator. It is important for the physical education teacher to communicate regularly with paraprofessionals and to clearly articulate expectations.

All educators – whether special education, physical education, adapted physical education, or related service personnel – should understand adapted physical education to ensure that students with disabilities receive appropriate physical education, based on their individual needs.

Additional resources are available on the PaTTAN website at www.pattan.net, under the Educational Initiatives tab.

Thanks to Robert Arnhold, Slippery Rock University; Monica Lepore, West Chester University; David Lorenzi, Indiana University of Pennsylvania; Gene White, East Stroudsburg University; and, the Pennsylvania State Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance for their content expertise and contributions to this publication.

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Tom Wolf
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