



Guidance for Physical Education for Students with Disabilities

Introduction

Physical education is essential to a student's overall education experience and builds a foundation for lifelong healthy living. The goal of physical education is to develop physically literate individuals who have the knowledge, skills and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthy physical activity. Individuals with a disability can particularly benefit from an active lifestyle: not only does it reduce the risk for secondary health problems, but all levels of functioning can be influenced positively (Hidde et al. 2004). A quality physical education program, specially designed if necessary, as a part of a student's overall education can help foster physical, emotional, and social skills for life.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and the Iowa Administrative Rules of Special Education (2010) require schools to provide free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). "Special education" specifically lists, "instruction in physical education," requiring all students to have access to appropriate physical education instruction. States and schools are required to provide equal opportunity to participate in physical education and extracurricular athletics by children and youth with and without disabilities.

It is the policy of the State of Iowa to provide FAPE for all resident children, ages birth through 21, with disabilities who are eligible for special education services (eligible individuals), in programs supervised by, and meeting the standards established and approved by the State Education Agency. The Iowa Administrative Rules of Special Education require agencies to provide a full continuum of placements and services to students requiring special education. The goal of this document is to provide a lens through which to understand and implement physical education for students with disabilities within the context of IDEA.

The IDEA defines a child with a disability as a child having one of the disabilities specified in section 602(3) of the IDEA who, by reason of the disability, needs special education and related services. In this document, the term "disabilities" refers to individuals who are eligible for special education, which includes all categories of disability unless specifically noted. This inclusive meaning must inform the readers' understanding and interpretation of the document's suggestions, which are necessarily broad.

This document includes sections with definitions of common words and phrases, physical education requirements, serving eligible individuals, examples, references and resources.

Definitions

It is important to have a shared understanding of the language used in physical education and in serving eligible individuals. Below are some common words and phrases and the definitions that will be used in this document. When appropriate, definitions come from Iowa Code and Iowa Administrative Code.

Accommodations are supports or services provided to help a student access the general curriculum and demonstrate learning. Student expectations are the same for students with accommodations.

Adapted Physical Education (APE) is a continuum of physical education services designed to meet the unique needs of an eligible individual with disabilities through **Specially Designed Instruction (SDI)**. APE is a direct service placement that should be provided in the least restrictive environment (LRE). APE may also be referred to as **Special Physical Education**.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) is the provision of special education and related services provided at public expense that meets the unique needs of an eligible individual.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a written document for each student with disabilities, developed in accordance with Iowa's administrative rules of special education, that describes the special education support and related services that the individual will receive. IEPs are to be reviewed at least annually with an appropriate team.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): IDEA requires that eligible individuals participate with nondisabled children in programs and activities to the maximum extent appropriate to meet the needs of that child. LRE is based on the presumption that the general education environment is the default choice for educating all individuals.

Modifications made to the physical education performance standards is specially designed instruction and should be reflected in the IEP. Modifications change what a student is expected to know and/or be able to do.

Physical Education (P.E.) is outlined by IDEA as the development of physical and motor fitness; fundamental motor skills and patterns; and skills in aquatics, dance, and individual and group games and sports, including intramural and lifetime sports; and includes adapted physical education, movement education, and motor development.

Special Education is a set of services and supports provided at no cost to the parents and means adapting, as appropriate, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction including **Specially Designed Instruction (SDI)** to address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disabilities; and to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, in order to meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a way of designing and implementing a program that helps give students an equal opportunity to success by providing flexibility in access, engagement and assessment.

Physical Education Requirements

Within the IDEA, 34 C.F.R. section 300.108, 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 grade.
- b) **Regular physical education.** Each child with a disability must be afforded the opportunity to participate in the regular physical education program available to non-disabled children unless--
 - i) The child is enrolled full time in a separate facility; or
 - ii) 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.

Physical Education may take place in a variety of settings during early childhood, grades K-12, and transition. Physical education may take place within the classroom by an appropriately licensed general education teacher in early childhood education and up to Kindergarten. A licensed and endorsed physical education teacher must teach physical education class in grades 1-12. A licensed and endorsed physical education teacher may teach general, adapted and/or special physical education in grades Kindergarten through twelve. (281--Iowa Administrative Code chapter 12)

Early Childhood Education

High quality research-based early learning experiences are essential to build a foundation to successfully achieve the social and academic challenges of school-age programs. Iowa's school districts and their community partners operating [Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs](#) (SWVPP) and preschool classrooms providing [Early Childhood Special Education](#) (ECSE) services use instructional strategies and interventions to promote children's development and learning of the knowledge, behaviors, and skills included in the Iowa Early Learning Standards (IELS) [[Iowa Administrative Code chapter 281.16](#) and [Iowa Administrative Code chapter 281.41](#)]. The IELS emphasize developmentally appropriate content and skills children may know and be able to do prior to entering kindergarten including the areas of social emotional (Area 1) and physical well-being and motor development (Area 2). These skills and knowledge should be addressed by physical education curricula led by the classroom teacher or a physical education teacher.

K-12 Content Specifications and Recommended Standards

All students in grades K-12 are required to participate in physical education each semester unless exempted or excused (Iowa Code § 256.11). Content specifications for physical education are in Iowa Administrative Code chapter 12. Content specifications list the kinds of activities that must be taught while recommended standards provide additional guidance through anchor standards and grade level outcomes (GLOs) that specify what a student should know and be able to do. Not all content specifications or GLOs need to be covered at each grade level, but all content must be covered at some point during the grade span. Time allocated to physical education, content specifications, and standards is locally determined.

Graduation requirements. Completion of 1/8unit (900minutes or 15hours) *per semester* of enrollment in grades 9-12 is a requirement for graduation unless individual students are exempted or excused for specific semesters according to Iowa Code (below).

In accordance with the Healthy Kids Act, prior to graduating, a student in a school district or accredited nonpublic district who is "physically able" must complete a course in CPR. This course must include components that could lead to certification including psychomotor skills. The requirement is mandated for "physically able" students. Determining who is physically able is left to the judgment of the IEP Team and local school officials.

Exemptions and Excusals/Waivers. Individual medical or religious exemptions may apply to participation in physical education as well as the physical activity and CPR requirements of the Healthy Kids Act for grades 1-12 (Iowa Code § 256.11 and Iowa Administrative Code rule 281-12.5). Additionally, the law provides for excusals from physical education in certain circumstances in grades 9-12 (*Id.*).

Serving Eligible Individuals

Individual Education Programs (IEP)

The Individual Education Program (IEP) team is a group of people who come together at an IEP meeting to develop, review and revise a student's IEP. Each member of the team has a clearly defined role even if the individual members change from meeting to meeting. The team must include the following representatives: Parent(s) of the child; Child (if appropriate); at least one general education teacher; at least one special education teacher/provider; school representative qualified to provide specific information regarding specially designed instruction, Iowa's Core Curriculum and available resources of the agency; individual who can

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interpret use of evaluation results; others at the discretion of the parent or agency; and agency for Transition Planning, if appropriate. An individual may serve more than one role.

The members of the IEP team need to be knowledgeable or have special expertise about the student and the special education services, activities, and supports that could benefit the student. The district is encouraged to seek input from teachers who do not attend the meeting and who can provide knowledge or special expertise about the student's IEP. The IEP team, which includes both general and special education teachers, might benefit from participation by a general or adapted physical education teacher in order to develop the IEP.

The IEP must contain a statement of the child's academic achievement and functional performance, a statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals, and a statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services to be provided. Direct services are required educational services. Related services support the student to access and benefit from required educational services.

Services will be based on peer-reviewed research to the extent practicable. The IEP must also include an explanation of the extent to which an individual will not participate in the general education curriculum, in the general education environment, and in the activities described in Iowa Administrative Code rule 281—41.320(1)(e). The projected date for the start, frequency, location, duration and monitoring of services must be included in all IEPs.

Each child's IEP Team determines the special education and related services, and supplementary aides, services, and other supports that are needed to meet each child's unique needs in order for the child to:

- (1) advance appropriately toward attaining annual goals;
- (2) be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum and to participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities; and
- (3) be educated and participate in such activities with other children with disabilities and nondisabled children.

Physical Education in the IEP Process

Physical Education is a required direct service, not a related service in the IEP. IEP teams should consider the needs of the individual student to participate in physical education. If needed, the individual student's IEP may include goals, accommodations, and program modifications and supports for PE, as well as allowing an equal opportunity for participation in "extracurricular and other nonacademic activities," including athletics. This may include supports to address challenging behavior to allow the student to participate in PE, or assistive technology (such as adapted or modified equipment). If the student needs adaptations or modifications to participate in PE, the physical education teacher should be a member of the IEP Team, be consulted when determining placement for physical education or, at least, be aware of the findings and goals (if any) regarding an eligible individual's placement in physical education. If adapted physical education is needed, the IEP must include a statement of how the child's progress toward annual goals (stated in IEP) will be measured and when periodic reports on progress will be provided (such as quarterly or other periodic reports concurrent with regular report cards). The IEP shall comply with any standards set by the Department about progress monitoring.

The Iowa Administrative Rules of Special Education require agencies to provide a full continuum of placements and services to students requiring special education in the least restrictive environment (LRE). IEP teams must decide a student's placement based on the services, activities, and supports needed by the student rather than by the programs that are available within the district.

The IEP team should use the following considerations, among other things, to determine the most appropriate services and LRE for the delivery of the physical education program.

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- Results of assessments
- Psychomotor, cognitive, and affective factors that would impact the student's ability to successfully and safely participate in general physical education.
- The effect of the behavior of the student with a disability on the other students.

From the information obtained and with input from the IEP team, both the services and environment that will meet the unique needs of the individual student are determined. The following list provides examples of service delivery models. This is not an exhaustive list and should not be used to limit options for services or environment.

Service Delivery Models may include:

- No specific services needed beyond Universal Design for Learning instruction in general physical education, which may involve less focus on competition and more focus on individual growth and developing lifelong fitness habits for all students
- Increased exposure to the general physical education curriculum
- Specific accommodations, modification, or supports described within the IEP
 - Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) within general physical education
 - Adapted physical education with SDI in addition to general physical education
 - SDI in adapted physical education
 - Peer Supported Physical Education
 - also known by other national, state, and local names (i.e. unified physical education)
 - One-on-one SDI in adapted physical education
 - Home or Hospital based adapted physical education services

*SDI requires the development of goals as well as a description of the services on the IEP

*Adapted Physical Education Consultation may be helpful to support the physical education teacher in program development, implementation, and/or student monitoring.

An eligible individual in a Special Education class for academic subjects should not automatically be placed in an adapted physical education class because of daily scheduling if that is not the service delivery model determined appropriate for the student by the IEP team. It is also inappropriate for the IEP team to deny children with disabilities the opportunity to participate in State mandated physical education instruction for the sole purpose of providing them with additional instruction in other content areas.

Transition Plan. The IEP must also include a transition plan which may include physical education. The goal of transition planning is to make the adjustment of youth with disabilities from high school to learning, living and working in the community as easy and successful as possible. Transition planning is determined by the IEP team with student involvement and includes ongoing planning, preparation, and revision. Physical Education may be a service in a transition plan to support academic, occupational, or life goals. A student may benefit from physical, social, and/or emotional skills and knowledge learned in physical education based on the student's interest, abilities, and plans for the future.

Examples

The [U.S. Department of Education's](#) Office of Special Education Programs ([OSEP](#)) issues written guidance to support the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). [OSEP's policy letters](#) provide written guidance and clarification regarding implementation in response to specific questions raised by parents, educators, representatives of advocacy organizations, state educational agencies, early intervention programs and their providers, and other interested parties. The following examples are supported by Dear Colleague Letters pertaining to physical education for students with disabilities.

- An eligible individual should not be denied physical education (regular or adapted) in order to add instructional minutes in another academic subject. The IEP Team may consider additional strategies and scheduling, such as an extended school day or extended school year, if the child requires such instruction in order to receive a free appropriate public education. [Letter to Irby, 55 IDELR 231 \(OSEP 2010\)](#)
- The IEP team may determine that an eligible individual in a preschool program requires adapted physical education to meet specific goals beyond the classroom social emotional learning and/or motor development activities. If physical education is specially designed to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability and is set out in that child's IEP, those services must be provided whether or not they are provided to other children. [Letter to Tymeson, 62 IDELR 123 \(OSEP 2013\)](#)
- The IEP team may determine that an eligible individual requires adapted physical education as a part of their transition plan. Adapted physical education may take place in the school setting or community-based transition program. If physical education is specially designed to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability and is set out in that child's IEP, those services must be provided whether or not they are provided to other children. [Letter to Kelly, 62 IDELR 184 \(OSEP 2013\)](#)

References

Hidde P. van der Ploeg, Allard J. van der Beek, Luc H.V. van der Woude and Willem van Mechelen.(2004). Physical Activity for People with a Disability. A Conceptual Model. Sports Medicine 34(10): 639-649 0112-1642/04/0010-0639. <http://foundationforpmr.org/old/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Physical-Activity-for-People-with-a-Disability.pdf>

Iowa Department of Education. Guidance for Quality Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). <https://educateiowa.gov/pk-12/special-education/iowas-guidance-quality-individualized-education-programs-ieps>

Iowa Department of Education. Physical Education Compliance. <https://educateiowa.gov/pk-12/instruction/physical-education-and-health-education>

The National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability (NCHPAD). <https://www.nchpad.org/>

U.S. Department of Education. Office of Special Education Programs:
[Letter to Irby, 55 IDELR 231 \(2010\)](#)
[Letter to Kelly, 62 IDELR 184 \(2013\)](#)
[Letter to Tymeson, 62 IDELR 123 \(2013\)](#)

Related Resources

Grant Wood Area Education Agency. Physical Education and Adapted Physical Education Services
<https://www.qwaea.org/index.php?cID=339>

Iowa IDEA Information. Guidance. Resources. Procedures. <https://iowaideainformation.org/>

Iowa Department of Education. Physical Education and Health Education. <https://educateiowa.gov/pk-12/instruction/physical-education-and-health-education>

Iowa Department of Education. Iowa Early Learning Standards. https://educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/IowaEarlyLearningStandards-3rdEdition12.20.18_508.pdf

Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE) America. Adapted Physical Education Resources. https://www.shapeamerica.org/publications/resources/teachingtools/teachertoolbox/Teachers_Toolbox_adapted.aspx

The National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability (NCHPAD) interactive [IEP Roadmap for Physical Education](#)

Wrightslaw. Physical Education for Students with Disabilities. <https://www.wrightslaw.com/info/pe.index.htm>