

### Eligibility Criteria for Adapted Physical Education Services

#### Position

SHAPE America recommends that students be considered eligible for adapted physical education services if their comprehensive score is 1.5 standard deviations below the mean on a norm-referenced test, or at least two years below age level on criterion-referenced tests or other tests of physical and motor fitness. Those tests include, but are not limited to, fundamental motor skills and patterns, and skills in aquatics, dance, individual games, group games and/or sports.

This position statement aims to help teachers, school administrators, local education agencies (LEA) and parents determine when it is appropriate to deliver special education services to a child in physical education and to consider the continuum of placements and services when providing this instruction.

Federal legislation (i.e., the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) considers students *eligible* for special education, including physical education, if they are identified as having one of the 14 disabilities named in the law. It is SHAPE America's position, however, that any student who has unique needs for instruction in physical education, regardless of disability, is entitled to receive appropriate accommodations through adapted physical education. Therefore, the term *eligibility* is used in this statement in the broadest sense.

#### Background

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 identifies physical education as a component of special education that provides for an equitable education experience for students ages three to 21 that is a free, appropriate, public education in the least restrictive environment. Procedures for determining eligibility and education-related needs for special services are outlined in federal regulations (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2005: § 300 / [D](#) / [300.306](#) / c).

Information can be drawn from a variety of sources, including aptitude and achievement tests, parent input and teacher recommendations, as well as data concerning a child's physical condition, social or cultural background and/or adaptive behavior. If a child has a disability, as defined by law, and needs special education, an individualized education program (IEP) must be developed for the child in accordance with federal regulations (USDE, 2005: § 300.320 through 300.324).

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Nowhere does the law state precisely what criteria for motor performance should be used to determine whether a student needs special physical education services. In other words, at what point should a child be considered for adapted physical education or other interventions along a continuum of services? LEAs across the country have used a variety of qualifying criteria for special education services, which include a continuum from general physical education to special class placements.

Determining motor performance is a multi-faceted process; therefore, tests used as part of this process should measure the areas of physical education listed in IDEA's definition of physical education. Specifically, they should include 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 or some combination thereof.

Because of potential differences in the assessment procedures used, students who receive adapted physical education services in one state might not qualify for those services in another state. Even more distressing, students who receive such services in one school district might not receive them in a neighboring district because of different eligibility criteria, different qualifications of teachers, or different modes of delivering the services. Thus, when a family moves, a child's learning opportunities can be compromised.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-112), a federal civil rights law protecting individuals with disabilities, prompted regulations that apply to state departments of education, school districts, and colleges and universities. All programs and activities receiving federal assistance were precluded from discriminating on the basis of "handicap." The law did not go far enough, however, in providing specific guidance with regard to a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment, which is the hallmark of subsequent education-related legislation.

Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) in 1975, with subsequent reauthorizations evolving into IDEA. This reauthorization currently requires that the education of children with disabilities be provided in the least restrictive environment. More precisely, each public agency must ensure, to the maximum extent appropriate, that any child with a disability is educated alongside his or her typically developing peers. It is the prerogative of each LEA to determine when a fully integrated approach for physical education is not in a child's best interest and, thus, what interventions are needed to support his or her learning.

### **Legislative Mandates**

IDEA (P.L. 108-446) defines physical education as a necessary component of special education for children and youth ages three to 21 who qualify for special education services. The term "special education" means specially-designed instruction, at no cost to parents, that meets the unique needs of a child with a disability. This specially-designed instruction includes: (a) instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings; and (b) instruction in physical education (USDEducation, 2005: §300.26).

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IDEA also defines physical education as a direct service, which includes instruction in physical fitness; motor fitness; fundamental motor skills and patterns; and skills in aquatics, dance and individual and group games and sports (including intramurals and lifetime sports). As mentioned in IDEA, service-delivery options can take place in a variety of settings, ranging from instruction in the home or hospital to inclusion in a general education class. The setting should always be based on a student's individual needs.

Removing children with disabilities from the general physical education environment should occur only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in the regular classes, with the use of supplementary aids and services, cannot be performed satisfactorily.

In the event that specially-designed physical education services are prescribed, IDEA mandates the inclusion of adapted physical education goals and objectives in a child's IEP, as well as statements that describe:

- a. The student's current level of performance, measurable goals and objectives
- b. Placement options available for implementing the education program
- c. Assessment procedures used to determine when the goals and objectives are achieved
- d. The accommodations to be provided so that the student can participate in physical education safely and successfully

School-age children who have disabilities but do not qualify for services under IDEA nevertheless are protected from discrimination based on disability. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 mandates that LEAs provide a free, appropriate public education for every child with a qualifying disability:

No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal assistance (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1974: 29 U.S.C. §794(a), 34 C.F.R. §104.4(a)).

Children with disabilities are never required to try out for, meet specific criteria (such as skill level, behavior or need for support), or qualify for admittance into the general physical education class. Therefore, LEAs must provide reasonable accommodations for physical education, as well as equal opportunities for students who wish to participate in extracurricular, intramural or interscholastic sports programs.

#### **Relationship of Adapted PE to the National Standards for Physical Education**

All students are entitled to a quality physical education. Adapted physical education *is* quality physical education, consistent with the curriculum approved by the LEA, taught to able-bodied students and tailored to the needs of individual students.

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A quality physical education program has a curriculum that is based on standards, is developmentally appropriate, identifies measurable learning goals, and includes a scope and sequence. A few states have their own written standards; it is recommended, however, that states that do not already have written standards for physical education adopt SHAPE America's National Standards for K-12 Physical Education. These National Standards provide the foundation for quality physical education programs that are both developmentally and instructionally relevant for all students (SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators, 2014). Adapted physical education, therefore, should also be built upon these standards, which hold that a physically literate individual:

**Standard 1:** demonstrates competency in a variety of motor skills and movement patterns.

**Standard 2:** applies knowledge of concepts, principles, strategies and tactics related to movement and performance.

**Standard 3:** demonstrates the knowledge and skills to achieve and maintain a health-enhancing level of physical activity and fitness.

**Standard 4:** exhibits responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others.

**Standard 5:** recognizes the value of physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression and/or social interaction.

The teacher of students with disabilities in physical education must employ an appropriate menu of different strategies while developing and implementing a physical education curriculum that ensures that students of *all* abilities have the opportunity to pursue a lifetime of healthful physical activity.

“The idea of differentiating instruction is an approach to teaching that advocates active planning for and attention to student differences in classrooms, in the context of high-quality curriculums” (Tomlinson, 1992).

Differentiation allows teachers to manipulate four variables to better ensure student success:

- Content (what you teach)
- Process (how you teach)
- Environment (where and with what you teach)
- Product (how student learning is measured)

The teacher adapts the curriculum to fit the needs, interests and abilities of *each* student. Using the National Standards as a compass, and with appropriate professional development and support, teachers of adapted physical education should be equipped to provide students with the active learning experiences they need to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to which they are entitled.

### Physical Education Placement for Children With Disabilities

IDEA states that students with disabilities must be placed in the least restrictive environment:

To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities ... are educated with children without disabilities, and that special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from regular education environments occur *only* when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1977, p. 42497).

The least restrictive environment is defined as the setting where students with disabilities can work, successfully and safely, on the general physical education curriculum, as well as on their individualized objectives (as outlined in their IEP). Students with disabilities can be placed in general physical education (GPE), a GPE setting with modifications, in a segregated setting, or a combination of GPE and segregated placement. In any case, the placement decision should relate to what is most beneficial educationally to the student and must be based on the student's current level of performance.

In some court cases, “beneficial” has been defined broadly to mean working purposefully and effectively on IEP goals and learning the psychomotor skills that able-bodied students are being taught, as well as non-academic benefits such as improved social skills and behavior. The physical educator involved in the process, whether it is the adapted physical education specialist or the general physical educator, must keep these goals in mind.

In addition, it is important to remember that adapted physical education is the *service*, not the *placement*. So, if a child has unique needs in motor performance, the decision on placement still rests with the entire multidisciplinary team. The adapted physical education specialist is part of the multidisciplinary team and is an essential player in the decision-making process. Thus, together, the team should determine modifications and the most appropriate placement for the child.

A student's psychomotor skill set is not the only area that the multidisciplinary team must take into consideration: at least two forms of measurement should be used. The team must take into consideration behavior, sensory needs, socialization skills, ability to perform with the class, and individualized goals — as well as parent preferences —when making decisions regarding placement and providing services. For example:

Eighth-grader Dishon has spina bifida and uses a wheelchair. Although he scored below the 25th percentile, or at -0.7 standard deviations below the mean on the Brockport Fitness Test, his positive behavior and excellent social skills led his multidisciplinary team to decide that he should be placed in GPE. That was deemed the least restrictive environment in which Dishon could work on his IEP objectives. So, psychomotor ability represents only one component used in the decision-making process.

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Fourth-grader Yuki has autism. Although she is above the 85th percentile, or 1.0 standard deviations above the mean on her psychomotor tests, she has a difficult time in a GPE class with 60 children, two teachers and her paraeducator. The noise and student movement cause her to retreat, curling up in a corner. A more appropriate placement for Yuki would be a much smaller class with several trained peer tutors.

SHAPE America's Adapted Physical Activity Special Interest Group recommends that fitness, psychomotor skills, socialization, behavior, ability to be in large groups, and parental interests be carefully considered before determining a student's placement. In addition, the entire multidisciplinary team that works with a child should make the decision. The multidisciplinary team, including the adapted physical educator and general physical educator, brings a wealth of backgrounds and experiences to the table and can make an informed decision better than one person who might have limited knowledge of the child's needs.

### Action Statement

As practiced today, adapted physical education has been shaped significantly by the mandates within IDEA. Those mandates prescribe an obvious, yet not always initiated, course of action that all stakeholders in a student's physical education must follow.

Teachers, curriculum designers, administrators and parents must seek the most equitable ways of making the knowledge and skills of the discipline of physical education accessible to each student. *All* must share a dedication to SHAPE America's goal of developing physically literate individuals who have the knowledge, skills and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity (SHAPE America, 2014).

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1989) has formulated a vision for accomplished teaching. Paraphrased here, that vision certainly is suitable as physical educators act on the tenets of this position statement:

Accomplished teachers must be committed to knowing each student and implementing the most suitable instruction for his or her abilities, which includes using diverse instruction strategies to teach for understanding, and multiple methods for measuring student growth and understanding. Teachers also must collaborate with other professionals to improve student learning; work on instruction policy, curriculum development and staff development; and evaluate school progress and the allocation of resources to meet state and local education objectives.

Any stakeholder in the process of reviewing policy for appropriately placing students for adapted physical education services must initiate these steps:

- Advocate consistently for the importance of physical education for students with disabilities, focusing foremost on each child's needs.
- Know the law regarding the education of students with disabilities.
- Familiarize oneself with the LEA's guidelines regarding educating students with disabilities.

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- Identify and involve relevant stakeholders, both within and beyond the school setting, to assess the current policy and services regarding placing students with disabilities in physical education.
- Establish guidelines to determine entry, exit and placement criteria for appropriate services for children with disabilities. Determining a child's eligibility for adapted physical education services should include an appropriate testing method to evaluate his or her current level of performance and other relevant sources of information, such as parents and teachers.
- Provide a continuum of placement options for children with disabilities beyond just segregated adapted physical education and full inclusion.
- Develop quality adapted physical education curricula that are consistent with the SHAPE America National Standards and the curriculum for able-bodied students, to meet the needs and abilities of each student.
- Design and implement staff development to enhance teachers' understanding and practice of teaching adapted physical education.
- Monitor the ongoing progress of each student to ensure that instruction occurs in the least restrictive environment.

### **Suggested Citation**

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### Resources

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### Commonly Used Motor Assessment Tools

Bruininks-Oseretsky Test of Motor Proficiency (BOT-2)

American Guidance Service

<https://www.pearsonclinical.com/therapy/products/100000648/bruininks-oseretsky-test-of-motor-proficiency-second-edition-bot-2.html>

Devpro Motor Skills Assessment

C&D Kofahl Enterprises

<http://www.devprosoftware.com/usingwin.php>

FITNESSGRAM® and Brockport Physical Fitness Test Human Kinetics

<http://www.cooperinstitute.org/fitnessgram>

<http://www.humankinetics.com/products/all-products/brockport-physical-fitness-test-manual-2nd-edition-with-web-resource>

Test of Gross Motor Development (TGMD-2)

Pro-Ed

[www.proedinc.com](http://www.proedinc.com)

### Internet Resources

<https://www.shapeamerica.org//publications/resources/pa/upload/Adapted-Physical-Education-Resource-Manual.pdf>

*Adapted Physical Education Resource Manual*, SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators

<https://www.shapeamerica.org//publications/resources/pa/upload/Disability-Etiquette.pdf>

*Disability Etiquette: Tips for Interacting With Individuals With Disabilities*, St. Mary's County Commission for People with Disabilities

<http://www.campabilities.org/instructional-materials.html>

Camp Abilities. Instructional videos for teaching children with visual impairments.

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<http://www.ncpeid.org/>

National Consortium for Physical Education for Individuals With Disabilities. Includes information about the APENS exam.

[www.flaghouse.com](http://www.flaghouse.com)

Physical education and adaptive equipment catalog.

[www.paralympic.org](http://www.paralympic.org)

International Paralympic Games. Includes descriptions of Paralympic sports.

[www.specialolympics.org/](http://www.specialolympics.org/)

Special Olympics is the world's largest sports organization for people with intellectual disabilities

[www.makoa.org/index.htm](http://www.makoa.org/index.htm)

Disability information and resources.

[www.nscd.org/](http://www.nscd.org/)

National Sports Center for the Disabled

[www.infinitec.org](http://www.infinitec.org)

Information about assistive technology as well as training, equipment, and access to specialists and resources.

<http://www.pheamerica.org/category/adapted-pe/> Web site for physical education teachers, with a section devoted to adapted physical education.

[www.usaba.org](http://www.usaba.org)

United States Association of Blind Athletes

[www.tash.org](http://www.tash.org)

TASH works to advance inclusive communities through advocacy, research, professional development, policy, and information and resources for parents, families and self-advocates.

[www.icdri.org](http://www.icdri.org)

The International Center for Disability Resources on the Internet

[www.ncpad.org](http://www.ncpad.org)

National Center on Physical Activity and Disability