

What is Physical Education (PE)?

Physical education (PE) helps students develop skills that encourage them to be active and fit for life. It affects a student's physical, mental, and emotional health positively. PE helps children **learn about how their body moves** and prepares them to be physically active and healthier for life.

A few examples of PE activities include jumping, throwing, catching, gymnastics, jumping jacks, playing organized games or sports in groups, and much more.

Requirements to Provide PE for Students with Disabilities

In Virginia, PE is **required by law for all kindergarten through 10th-grade students**. This includes students with disabilities. Virginia's [Standards of Learning for PE](#) provide the curriculum standards for each grade level.

Students with disabilities who have an IEP are required to be provided a **free appropriate public education (FAPE)** under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This includes participation in PE **which is part of the IDEA definition of special education**. This means that students with disabilities must have the **same opportunity to participate in PE** as students without disabilities. Students with disabilities must receive the **accommodations and supports** needed to be able to participate in grade-level PE activities. It **cannot be substituted or replaced** with another subject area, extracurricular activity, related service, or sports program.

If the nature and severity of a student's disability along with accommodations and supports cannot provide meaningful progress towards the grade-level PE curriculum, the IEP team, which includes parents, can **meet to discuss the PE continuum of placement options** that includes adapted physical education services.

If the IEP team decides the student requires PE beyond the 10th grade, the school division must provide the service. As parents, you can make this request to the team.

What is Adapted PE (APE)?

APE is **specially designed instruction** for students with disabilities that meets their unique needs (including developmental needs) in physical education. Adapted PE, in most cases, will enable a student with a disability to access the general education PE curriculum (in current or modified form) and participate in PE activities alongside students without disabilities.

Adapted PE is not a place; it is a direct service that provides accommodations and modifications that make PE accessible for students with disabilities. Adapted PE can be delivered in the regular PE class, which may include one-on-one or small-group instruction. If necessary, it can also be delivered in a self-contained (separate) classroom.



Example Accommodations in PE for Students with Disabilities

Accommodations in PE or APE can involve changing the types of equipment used, activity directions, space, or additional supports like visuals. Here are a few examples:

- Changing rules to an activity such as using a hockey stick to kick a ball in soccer for students who use wheelchairs.
- Volleyball and badminton nets lowered for students who have limited strength.
- Using larger and softer balls and lightweight bats to meet gross motor needs.
- Reducing the size of an activity area and/or the size of a team to increase practice and participation.

How Do IEP Teams Decide if My Child Needs Adapted PE?

Like all other instructional decisions, the need for adapted PE is **an IEP team decision**. Once your child has been found eligible for special education and related services, the team will discuss your child's needs relating to participation in PE. If the team thinks your child cannot participate in grade-level PE activities, even with supplementary aides and resources, then the team will consider the need for adapted PE.

Evaluation of Needs



The IEP team will decide if your child requires additional services or supports to participate in PE. The PE or APE teacher should be present during the meeting to discuss needs and help decide if an evaluation for adapted PE is needed. Once agreed to (with parental consent), the evaluation will take place.

Review the Evaluation



After the evaluation, the IEP team will meet to discuss the findings. You are encouraged to ask questions and participate in the conversation. The report will include a recommendation regarding the need for APE services and what those services may look like.

Determine APE Services



If the IEP team decides your child qualifies for APE services, then APE will be included in the IEP as a required service. This should include PE goals, objectives (if required), adaptations, amount of time in APE each week or month, and where these services will be delivered. Remember, the student should only be removed from the general education environment, even for APE, if the services in the IEP cannot be implemented in the general education setting.

Physical Education for Students with Disabilities

A Resource Document



Who Provides APE?

IDEA requires that qualified staff who meet the state's requirements provide PE and APE services. In Virginia, this includes staff who have educational licensure in health and PE. Other related services professionals, like physical therapists, cannot provide PE services without the required licensure. APE services may be provided by a regular PE teacher, an APE teacher, or through a collaborative approach.

What Can Parents Do to Support Children in PE or APE?

- Understand what your child is entitled to when it comes to PE.
- Discuss with the IEP team the accommodations or adaptations your child may need to ensure their participation in grade-level PE activities alongside students without disabilities.
- If you think your child needs adapted PE, talk with the IEP team about evaluating to determine your child's needs.
- If adapted PE is required, be sure that the IEP lists specific PE goals and adaptations/accommodations along with information about when, where, and for how many hours your child will receive APE.

Additional Resources

[Wrightslaw: Physical Education for Students with Disabilities](#)

[Example Modifications in PE](#)

[What is Adapted Physical Education? NCPEID](#)

[Continuum of PE Placements: Overview](#)

[Physical Education | Virginia Department of Education Inclusive School Physical Education and Physical Activity | Healthy Schools | CDC](#)

[Strengthening Physical Education in Schools - CDC](#)



The contents of this factsheet were developed under a grant from the Virginia Department of Education, # **H027A190107** and the US Department of Education, #**H235F200001**. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government Project Officer. PEATC is not a legal services agency and cannot provide legal advice or legal representation. Any information contained in this training is not intended as legal advice and should not be used as a substitution for legal advice.

