

# **A Position Statement on Including Students with Disabilities in Physical Education**

*"Inclusion works when words turn into action, when we get it started, and when we work together to keep it going"*

Developed by a team of professionals from the Adapted Physical Activity Council  
of the American Association for Active Lifestyles and Fitness,  
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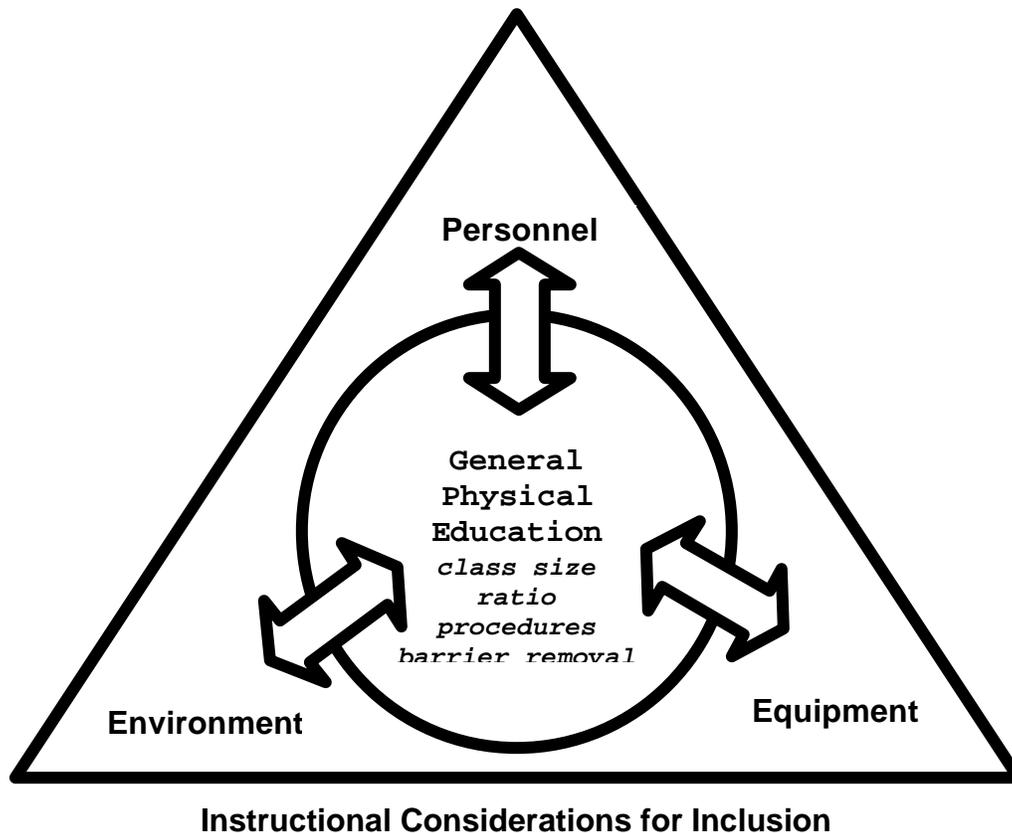
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This paper presents the official position of the American Association for Active  
Lifestyles and Fitness

## Background

Three decades ago, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975), was signed into law. This federal law has been reauthorized a number of times and is referred to as The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This landmark piece of legislation provides free and appropriate education, including physical education, to all children who have been identified as having a disability through the legal process outlined in IDEA from birth through 21 years of age. Provision of services for children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) is a critical component of recent reauthorization of IDEA. Current language used in IDEA includes increased emphasis on the participation of children with disabilities in the general curriculum, the involvement of general education teachers in developing, reviewing and revising the Individualized Education Program (IEP) document, and enhanced parent participation in eligibility and placement decisions.

A strong preference within IDEA is that children with disabilities are educated in neighborhood schools and general education classrooms (including physical education) whenever appropriate. Consequently, the general physical education class should be considered as the first placement option. In the general physical education (GPE) class instructional considerations will involve the organization of the GPE class itself, the environment, equipment modifications, and involvement of support personnel.



Inclusion in the general physical education program should be considered and determined on an individual basis so that the child with a disability can:

- achieve goals and objectives stated on the IEP
- participate and demonstrate learning in the general education setting
- demonstrate competency in state and district-wide physical fitness or skills assessment or alternative tests to match the child's unique needs

**Inclusion is not about getting students with disabilities out of separate adapted physical education classes; any more than it is about getting students with disabilities into general physical education classes. Rather, it is about students being members of a learning community where they have the choice of the most appropriate instructional setting, equal access, dignity, and the opportunity to participate in meaningful physical activity.**

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) means that to the maximum extent possible, each child with a disability must be educated with children who are not disabled unless the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in the general environment with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. Language regarding LRE is found in the IDEA amendments of 1997, Section 1412(a)(5)(A), and Section 300.550(b)(1)(2) of Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

The following chart shows some examples of environmental, personnel, and equipment modifications that could assist children with disabilities to be successful in the general education program.

|                     | <b>LRE SETTINGS</b>   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                         |                           |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>APE SERVICES</b> | GPE no support needed | GPE with support                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Combination GPE + Separate APE                                                          | Separate APE              |
| <b>Environment</b>  | general requirements  | Curriculum Modifications and/or Instructional Modifications<br>Barrier removal<br>Class size<br>Organizational changes                                                                                                                                                        | Variable and will change depending on curriculum and instructional modifications needed | Small group or individual |
| <b>Personnel</b>    | general requirements  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• APE Specialist</li> <li>• Peers</li> <li>• Aides</li> <li>• Physical Therapists</li> <li>• Occupational Therapists</li> <li>• Special Educators</li> <li>• Administrators</li> <li>• Nurses/Doctors</li> <li>• Community-</li> </ul> |     |                           |

|                  |                         |                                                              |                                                                                    |
|------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                  | <b>LRE<br/>SETTINGS</b> |                                                              |                                                                                    |
|                  |                         | based<br>professionals                                       |                                                                                    |
| <b>Equipment</b> | general<br>requirements | size<br>texture<br>weight<br>color<br>function<br>technology |  |

**GPE = General Physical Education      APE = Adapted Physical Education**

### LRE Setting AND APE Services Model

Specific considerations that teachers have identified as concerns or possible barriers to providing quality instruction in GPE environments includes:

- Class size
- Ratio of students with disabilities to those without
- Type and severity of disability
- Available support personnel

These are important considerations and represent **real** barriers that physical educators face when attempting to conduct positive outcome-based inclusion programs in GPE. The reality is that numerous factors affect the success of inclusion in GPE, such as teacher motivation and skill, how the IEP team functions, and economics. However, in the world of "best practice" these types of barriers should **NEVER** be used to exclude a student from the GPE program. Therefore, it is incumbent upon all teachers, administrators, and physical education professionals to work relentlessly to reduce the negative affects of these barriers in order that all students with disabilities can participate in a quality physical education program. These considerations and barriers should be discussed at the IEP team meeting and modified whenever possible so that the student with a disability can be successful in the GPE program. Keep in mind that not all students with disabilities will require APE services.

### Position on Inclusion and Physical Education

The following statements represent the position of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (AAHPERD) on the inclusion of children with disabilities who need APE services in physical education:

- Students with disabilities must be included to the maximum extent possible in the general physical education program.
- Students with disabilities in general physical education will have the opportunity to learn and perform in the physical, cognitive, and social-emotional domains.
- Students with disabilities must be actively engaged participants in meaningful learning experiences in the general physical education class, not just in the physical proximity or space. For example, inclusion is NOT a student with a disability playing catch with a teaching assistant or peer while the rest of the class is engaged in a game activity such as basketball. The best inclusive environments offer a variety of activities at different levels of difficulty so ALL students can be involved in learning.
- Students with disabilities must not be removed from or placed into the general physical education program except through the IEP team decision-making

- process. (Ultimately, it is the school's responsibility to justify why the student cannot be educated in a general physical education setting.)
- Decisions involving the inclusion of students with disabilities into the general physical education program must consider the safety of ALL students, including the students with disabilities. *Often, safety concerns can be addressed with supplementary aides and supports, and such supplements should be tried before removing the child due to safety concerns.*
  - The inclusion of students with disabilities into the general physical education program must not compromise the learning of other students in the class. *Often, learning concerns can be addressed with supplementary aides and supports, and such supplements should be tried before removing the child due to learning concerns.*
  - Families must be meaningfully involved in the IEP team decision-making process related to the inclusion of their child in the general physical education program.
  - Students with disabilities in the general physical education program must receive regular evaluation of progress toward IEP goals as often as same age peers receive evaluation feedback such as report cards.
  - Supplementary aides and services, as well as other instructional support (as needed) will be provided in the general physical education environment to students with disabilities and/or the physical educator.
  - General physical educators will receive direct and/ or consultative services from qualified professionals in adapted physical education (APE) to support the inclusion of students with disabilities when needed.
  - The voice of students with disabilities will be heard and they will participate in the IEP team decision-making process to the maximum extent possible.
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## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### ***How does inclusion relate to General Physical Education and LRE?***

Children with disabilities have the right to be meaningfully engaged in learning in GPE. Quality physical education programs account for individual differences in all students and are accountable for the goals of a physically educated person developed by NASPE (2004). This being the case, general physical education that is both individualized and meets NASPE's comprehensive set of content standards will quite often be the LRE for students with disabilities. When students with disabilities are able to receive quality instruction in the general physical education class this is referred to as "inclusion." Note. *See the LRE Setting and APE Services Model.*

### ***How are inclusion and LRE different?***

**LRE** is a mandate of IDEA and requires that to the maximum extent possible students with disabilities are educated with students without disabilities in the general physical education program. LRE is a continuum of environments where instruction takes place and services are provided as needed. LRE has many options for instructional environments from inclusion to separate APE services

**Inclusion** is a philosophy of acceptance that supports placing students with disabilities in their neighborhood schools. Supplementary aids and services, or other supports are brought to the student while in the general physical education class rather than having the student go to these services in a separate class.

***Should I have an APE class set up in my school for students who need it?***

APE is a **service** not a **setting**. This is a very important distinction. You must ensure that all students with disabilities that need **APE services** receive this service in order to benefit from quality instruction in physical education in the **LRE, which is the setting**. Look at the *APE Services and LRE Setting Model* on page-3 of this booklet. All those involved in an IEP team meeting, including you, must consider the most appropriate APE services and LRE setting for each child on a case by case basis. Some students might benefit from a combination of GPE and a separate APE class, in which case having this setting available is important. Flexibility in your schedule is key here and this is something that is important to discuss with your school administrator. Show him or her this document; many administrators are not aware how IDEA impacts physical education.

***Who is a “qualified” professional in APE?***

The definition of “qualified” is determined by each state. Unlike other special education areas (i.e., teachers, speech therapist, etc.) most states do not have a special or unique certification for teachers of adapted physical education. The Adapted Physical Education National Standards (APENS) have been put in place in order to reflect the minimal competencies teachers need to deliver appropriate physical education services to students with disabilities. For more information see the APENS website at [www.cortland.edu/APENS/](http://www.cortland.edu/APENS/) or contact AAHPERD at 800-213-7193 x430.

***When should a general physical educator be involved in the IEP team decision-making process?***

Any time a student with a disability is not learning and cannot be successful in GPE the physical educator should make a referral to the appropriate school committee. Being a member of the IEP team requires that the general physical educator be involved in assessment, instructional recommendations, program implementation strategies, determination of instructional goals and objectives, and ongoing evaluation. Collaboration with other professionals is essential to making the IEP process work. If the general physical educator were not knowledgeable of the IEP process this would be a good time to seek out the assistance of an APE specialist or consultant or contact your state chapter of AAHPERD or AAHPERD directly at 800-213-7193 x430.

***Does a general physical educator need to write IEP goals and objectives for a student with a disability who is included in his or her physical education class?***

Yes. Whenever a student needs unique or special instructional services in GPE. All teachers must be accountable for their instructional program; learning is the primary focus of physical education and it is important that ALL students are learning. Physical educators must plan and prepare an IEP for a student with a disability that requires accommodations and modifications and is included in the general education program in order to ensure that the student is working toward his or her individualized goals. Progress toward these goals must be evaluated on the same schedule as report cards. Physical educators should ask for support from an APE specialist when necessary, because meeting the challenges of inclusion requires additional preparation, training, and courage to try new things.

Keep in mind that many students in special education do not need APE services because their disability does not affect their motor performance. These students should attend GPE classes and participate in the required curriculum and do not need special education goals and objectives.

***Has anybody asked the students how they feel about being included in general physical education?***

Yes. When students with disabilities were asked what is a good day in physical education (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000) they said....

*"I feel like I belong, because my peers cheer me on or the teachers say I am doing a good job; I share in receiving the benefits from participation," because I am learning and improving my skills; and I have confidence in my skills, I like my peers to see that I am doing well in physical education."*

When asked what is a bad day in physical education students with disabilities said....

*"I feel like my participation is restricted, my classmates don't pass the ball to me and the teachers don't let me play; my abilities are questioned, my peers think I can't do it; I feel socially isolated and rejected; I lose my autonomy and feel like I have no control over what happens to me or the outcomes."*

Physical educators can learn from listening to what students with disabilities say about their needs and experiences. This information can then be used to modify the general physical education environment, equipment, and personnel.

***Where do I start?***

If you already run a program that accounts for individual differences in your students without disabilities and meets the National Standards for Physical Education (1995) developed by NASPE, then it will not be a big step to include students who have disabilities. The **Instructional Considerations for Inclusion model** on page-2 identifies four key areas physical education teachers should consider when modifying the instructional program for students with disabilities and/or unique instructional needs in GPE; ***organization of the GPE class itself, the environment, equipment, and support personnel.***

**Environment:** Inclusion means everyone belongs in a school that is a "community" of learners. A positive learning environment invites all students to participate in meaningful learning that offers a variety of opportunities for personal successes. Attention to the social environment is important to the success of inclusion. Teachers must closely monitor the social environment to protect all students from ridicule, exclusion or discrimination. Environmental adaptations can include both ***Curriculum*** modifications (***what is taught***) as well as ***Instructional*** modifications (***how it is taught***). Possible places to start include:

- Using small group instructional approaches such as stations, centers, contracts, task cards, or agendas.
- Emphasize diversity and include social responsibility in your physical education program goals. (See ***Hellison, 2003*** or ***Gibbs, 2001*** for ideas you can use!)
- Measuring success in a variety of ways such as journals, portfolios, interest surveys, skill inventories, and/or class discussion.
- Incorporating cooperative games, team building activities, and/or individual goal setting, while avoiding elimination type activities. (See ***Kasser, 1995*** or ***Hichwa, 1998*** for ideas you can use!)

- De-emphasizing traditional type team sport approaches and instead focus on skill themes, health-related fitness, lifetime leisure skills, and/or adventure education.
- Moving away from the 3 to 4 week multi-activity units and instead extend practice time in skill theme areas or skills for an active lifestyle.
- Offering multiple ways to demonstrate personal competence based on individualized goals determined at the beginning of a unit, theme, or activity.
- Changing the game design by modifying one or several of the components; purpose, players, movements, objects, organization, and/or limits (See *Morris & Stiehl, 1999* for ideas you can use!).

**Equipment:** Be creative by increasing a variety of equipment (including adapted or assistive devices) as well as multiple pieces of equipment. Equipment selection will vary per activity, student, facility, surface, and purpose. Consider changes in size, texture, weight, color, and function of equipment, as well as electronic or technological devices that will enhance learning. The ways equipment can be modified is endless and limited only by ones imagination and creativity, a few examples include:

- A very large and light ball instead of a traditional volleyball to change the pace of the game.
- Balls with sound to assist in tracking.
- Velcro or other strapping devices to enhance grip on a racquet or bat.
- Heart rate monitors to ensure safe heart rate zones and provide concrete feedback.
- Computer technology to provide additional information, a greater variety of visual demonstrations, or to repeat instructions.

### **Personnel**

Collaboration with others is key to making inclusion work. General physical educators should develop a community of support that can facilitate the inclusion process. Support personnel could include:

- |                                                                             |                                            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| • APE Specialists                                                           | • Peers                                    |
| • Aides                                                                     | • Physical Therapists                      |
| • Occupational Therapists                                                   | • Special Educators                        |
| • O & M Specialists                                                         | • Vision Specialists                       |
| • Administrators                                                            | • Nurses/Doctors/Health Care Professionals |
| • Community-based professionals (i.e., Recreation, Fitness, Rehabilitation) | • University Faculty                       |

### ***How do I know when inclusion is working?***

Inclusion is a complex issue that is interpreted differently by different people. "Inclusion" is not just being together in the same "space," but all children engaging in meaningful activities together, sharing equal status, and learning together. Inclusion is a "process" and there is no exact measure of success. However, one way to evaluate how your program is "working" for all students is to use these **principles** of inclusion as indicators:

- **Social Justice:** All people have equal value and each person has a right to an equal share of the services and materials available.
- **Equal Opportunity:** All people have the right to be treated equally, to have choices and to take risks. No person should be discriminated against; neither

should rules or conditions exist that make it more difficult for some people to participate than others.

- **Non-categorization:** People are individuals with many things in common and some things different. There is no such thing as a "category" of people that are all the same.
- **Non-segregation:** People need contact with a variety of people; this helps us all understand about various ways of life and allows us to make choices with greater awareness.

### *What resources are out there on inclusion in physical education?*

#### **Books:**

Lieberman, L. and Houston-Wilson, C. (2002). Strategies for Inclusion: A Handbook for Physical Educators. Human Kinetics: Champaign, IL. [www.humankinetics.com](http://www.humankinetics.com)

Davis, R. (2002). Inclusion Through Sports. Human Kinetics: Champaign, IL. [www.humankinetics.com](http://www.humankinetics.com)

Block, M. (2000). A Teachers Guide to Including Students with Disabilities in General Physical Education (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Paul H. Brookes: Baltimore, MD  
[www.brookespublishing.com](http://www.brookespublishing.com)

Hellison, D. (2003). Teaching Responsibility Through Physical Activity. Human Kinetics: Champaign, IL. [www.humankinetics.com](http://www.humankinetics.com)

Morris, G. S. D. & Stiehl, J.(1999). Changing Kids' Games, 2nd edition. Human Kinetics: Champaign, IL. [www.humankinetics.com](http://www.humankinetics.com)

Randazzo, D. & Corless, K. (1998). Activity for Everyone: Children of All Abilities in a Regular Physical Activity Program. Available through AAHPERD publications at (800) 321-0789 or online at [www.aahperd.org](http://www.aahperd.org)

Hichwa, J. (1998). Right Fielders are People Too: An Inclusive Approach to Teaching Middle School Physical Education. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.  
[www.humankinetics.com](http://www.humankinetics.com)

Lieberman, L. & Cowart, J. (1996). Games for People with Sensory Impairments: Strategies for Including Individuals of all Ages (1996). Human Kinetics: Champaign, IL.  
[www.humankinetics.com](http://www.humankinetics.com)

Kasser, S. (1995). Inclusive Games. Human Kinetics: Champaign, IL.  
[www.humankinetics.com](http://www.humankinetics.com)

Moving to Inclusion (1995). By the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability. To order: (613) 748-5639 or FAX (613) 748-5737

#### **Web sites:**

*American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance: National Association for Sport and Physical Education and the Adapted Physical Activity Council (through the American Association for Active Lifestyles and Fitness) can be located here.*  
<http://www.aahperd.org>

*PE Central: Lots of lesson plan ideas.*  
[www.pecentral.org](http://www.pecentral.org)

*Physical Education for Infants, Children, and Youth with Disabilities: A Position Statement (2003)*  
[www.aahperd.org/aaalf/pdf\\_files/pos\\_papers/apa\\_positionpaper.pdf](http://www.aahperd.org/aaalf/pdf_files/pos_papers/apa_positionpaper.pdf)

*Project INSPIRE: Information about disability, inclusion and links to many other sources of information.*  
[www7.twu.edu/~f\\_huettig/](http://www7.twu.edu/~f_huettig/)

*The National Center on Physical Activity and Disability: Latest information on physical activity and specific disabling conditions.*  
[www.ncpad.org/](http://www.ncpad.org/)

**Equipment:**

Flaghouse: Special Populations Equipment Catalog  
[www.flaghouse.com](http://www.flaghouse.com)

Sportime: Abilitations- Adapted Equipment Catalog  
[www.sportime.com](http://www.sportime.com)

**References:**

- Federal Register, March 12, 1999m PL 105-17, IDEA 1997.
- Goodwin, D.L., & Watkinson, E.J. (2000). Inclusive Physical Education from the Perspective of Students with Physical Disabilities. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 17, 144-160.
- National Association for Sport and Physical Education (2004). *Moving Into The Future: National Standards for Physical Education, 2nd Edition*. Boston: WCB McGraw-Hill.

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