

# HOW DO I GET ADAPTED PHYSICAL EDUCATION SERVICES FOR MY CHILD IN SPECIAL EDUCATION?

## WHAT IS ADAPTED PHYSICAL EDUCATION AS A SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICE?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) requires physical education as part of the definition of special education for students with disabilities, ages 3–21+ as part of a free and appropriate public education (34 C.F.R.300.39(b)(2)).

**Adapted Physical Education (APE)** is specially designed instruction to meet a student’s unique needs through individualized instruction in the least restrictive environment. APE supports accessibility by aligning with state standards and grade level curricula, allowing all students to participate meaningfully. APE teachers serve vital roles including providing specially designed instruction, evaluations, consultation, and active participation on Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams. APE is a required special education service, unlike related services such as physical and occupational therapy.



## WHY IS SCHOOL-BASED PHYSICAL EDUCATION IMPORTANT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES?



School-based physical education provides many research-based benefits including improved physical health, mental well-being, and social skills (Goh & Connolly, 2020). It also fosters teamwork and leadership skills through group activities that enhance social connections. Furthermore, physical education is linked to improved academic performance, as physical activity can increase concentration and cognitive function (Donnelly et al., 2016). By teaching lifelong physical activity habits, physical education contributes to a healthier society and prepares students for active lifestyles (Siedentop et al., 2022).

However, there can be barriers to quality and appropriate physical education for students with disabilities due to insufficient resources and supports, misunderstood requirements, lack of properly prepared teachers, and inadequate facilities and equipment (Wang, 2019). To address these challenges and ensure equitable access to physical education, **Adapted Physical Education (APE)** services are often needed and are part of special education. Qualified APE teachers are essential for providing the required specially designed physical education instruction, supports, and adaptations to ensure students with disabilities receive meaningful opportunities to benefit from physical education like their peers without disabilities.



## HOW TO RECEIVE APE SERVICES

To receive APE for your child, follow the same steps used for all special education services:

**Request an Evaluation for APE Services:** Someone (e.g., parent, other family member, general PE teacher, classroom teacher, physical therapist) can request in writing a special education evaluation for APE services (Sec. 300.304). Individuals with disabilities, ages 3 to 21+ may qualify for APE services. This written request should be sent to the appropriate school administrators and teachers.

**Evaluation:** A formal evaluation of your student’s present level of performance in PE should be conducted by a professional who has knowledge and qualifications to select, administer, and interpret the educational results of the evaluation (e.g., APE teacher, physical education teacher). It is recommended by SHAPE America that students who are 1.5 standard deviations or more below the mean or 2 years chronologically below their peers qualify for APE services (2018). Check with your school district for written APE eligibility criteria.

**Meeting to Develop IEP:** There is a meeting to discuss the results of the evaluation to make a determination if the student is eligible for adapted physical education services. If the IEP team determines your child is eligible for APE services, the IEP document should include specific PE content such as measurable goals, accommodations, placement, and services—including APE, if needed. Like other special education and related services, specific APE provisions (e.g., frequency and duration of services, progress monitoring, and who will provide instruction) are all determined during the IEP meeting.

If you feel the special education process is not being properly followed for your child in physical education, contact your state Parent Center or NCPEID for assistance.

### OSEP Parent Hub



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### Parent Request Letter



## SERVICE DELIVERY CONTINUUM

LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

- 1 **General Physical Education (GPE)**  
Needed accommodations provided by APE teacher
- 2 **GPE with APE consult**  
APE teacher provides consultative services to GPE teacher
- 3 **Unified/Partner PE**  
Equal number of students with and without disabilities in PE together
- 4 **GPE and/or APE Co-Teach**  
GPE and/or APE teachers work collaboratively
- 5 **Self-Contained APE**  
APE teacher provides services outside of GPE

## LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

### PLACEMENT IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

A student’s least restrictive environment (LRE) in physical education includes consideration of a continuum of educational placement options as required in IDEA (e.g., general physical education, APE with individualized instruction, APE small group class, peer supported physical education, or a combination of placements). The student’s placement for physical education is an IEP team decision, including parent(s) and/or families, is determined at least annually, and can be reviewed anytime as requested by parents.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### NCPEID POSITION PAPER FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS



### NCPEID ASK AN EXPERT



### PE FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WRIGHTSLAW



### PE IEP CHECKLIST



### SHAPE AMERICA FAQ ABOUT APE

