

Adapted Physical Education Answers to Frequently Asked Questions in Texas

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1. What is the role of the adapted physical educator?

Adapted physical educators have two major roles. The first is direct service provider. In this role, the APE teacher evaluates, plans, and implements instructional programs in physical and motor fitness, fundamental motor skills and patterns, and skills in aquatics, dance, individual and group games, and sports, including intramural and lifetime sports, for students with disabilities. The second role is consultant. Here the APE teacher helps others provide APE programs. Adapted physical educators perform formal student evaluations and are integral members of the individual education plan (IEP) team. Some districts have adapted physical educators who function solely as direct service providers while others work only as consultants. But most adapted physical educators provide some degree of direct and consulting services, depending on the needs of their districts.

2. Who can teach APE?

In Texas, the District Effectiveness and Compliance (DEC) guidelines for special education state that “physical education may be provided by special education instructional or related service personnel who have the necessary skills and knowledge, or physical education teachers, or occupational therapists, or physical therapists, or occupational or physical therapy assistants working under the supervision of certified personnel in accordance with the standards of their profession. If special education personnel provide these services, the district has the obligation to provide documentation such as in-service records, evidence of attendance at seminars or workshops, or transcripts of college courses to document necessary knowledge and skills.” This statement implies that any professional providing these services must be qualified and that the services must be listed as adapted physical education, not a related service.

3. Is there an APE certification?

No. About 17 states provide certification or endorsement in the area of APE. In Texas, some districts use the APENS examination to determine competency levels of those providing PE services to students with disabilities.

4. What is APENS?

APENS stands for Adapted Physical Education National Standards. Funded by a grant

through the U.S. Office of Education, the National Consortium for Physical Education and Recreation for Individuals With Disabilities developed APE standards and a national exam to measure knowledge related to them. Many general and adapted physical educators in Texas have taken and passed this voluntary exam.

5. How can I get additional training in APE?

Universities with APE programs offer courses online. The American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD), the National Conference on Physical Activity for the Exceptional Learner, the Texas Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (TAHPERD), and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) have strong APE components at their annual conventions and summer conferences and in their publications. In Texas, regional education service centers offer APE professional-development workshops throughout the state. Contact your regional center and suggest specific training in APE, inclusion in general PE, and evaluation.

6. Should every school district have an adapted physical educator?

Federal law states that all students are to receive PE, including students with disabilities. If a student is referred for an APE evaluation, a qualified professional who has training in administering and interpreting physical and motor evaluations in the area of APE should be the evaluator. If the student qualifies for APE, services must be provided by qualified school personnel as determined by the state.

7. Should APE be facilitated through athletics, physical education or special education?

Most programs for students with disabilities are facilitated through special education. But clearly PE and athletics should be integral parts of programming for students with disabilities, just as they are for students without disabilities. Students cannot be denied participation in PE and sports programs based solely on a disability.

8. Are there established APE programs that would be useful to visit?

Texas has about 1,100 school districts, and in many cases we do not know the quality of the APE programming. Some districts demonstrate high-quality programming in presentations at state conferences, administrative guides, Web sites, etc. Among them are the Denton, Northside, and Round Rock school districts.

9. Must a student be evaluated before being placed in APE?

Yes. We assume that all students begin in general PE. Any student who receives APE must have an evaluation on file. This evaluation must have been recognized and APE placement must have been approved in the IEP meeting. In addition, all students must have statements of PE goals and objectives. The goals and objectives are based on the evaluation data and must be written in measurable terms.

10. Who can do the APE evaluation?

The student should be evaluated by the APE specialist after a referral evaluation has been submitted by the general PE teacher. Evaluators should be professionals who have been trained and are qualified to administer and interpret physical and motor evaluations in the area of APE.

11. Which evaluation instrument should I use?

Evaluation instruments must be selected based on their suitability for the child's age and

for the activities to be evaluated. Norm-referenced tests tell us how particular children compare with their age-matched peers; it is usually on the basis of norm-referenced evaluations that we determine that children are lagging behind their peers. The second important criterion is to find an instrument that evaluates behaviors of interest. If you are interested in evaluating a child's motor skills, a paper-and-pencil test will not provide you with adequate information. Examples of evaluation instruments that specifically address a child's motor skills are:

- For early childhood: Peabody
- For ages 3-10: Test of Gross Motor Development-2
- For ages 6-17+: Competency Testing for Adapted Physical Education

Several Texas districts have begun using primary and secondary evaluations. The primary evaluation is a standardized instrument that is appropriate for non-disabled students and for most students with disabilities (e.g. Competency Test for Adapted Physical Education-Revised, Adapted Physical Education Assessment Scale). The primary evaluation provides information on how a student functions developmentally in relation to students of the same chronological age who do not have physical and motor disabilities. For students with certain disabilities, the primary evaluation may be inappropriate. In such cases, a secondary evaluation instrument is used to evaluate specific areas of strength and weakness based on the student's possible motor and physical disabilities. These secondary evaluation instruments are often standardized (e.g. TGMD-2); others are checklists or informal evaluations that are not norm-referenced (e.g. Project Mobility, Special Olympics). School districts that use this primary-secondary model include Denton, Fort Worth, and Houston.

12. Must a standardized evaluation be used in all cases?

Generally, yes. There are rare circumstances in which a standardized test may not produce the information needed for PE placement and programming. In such a case, it is acceptable to use bits and pieces from existing instruments. You will not be able to produce standardized data, but rather an instrument similar to an informal checklist. Your evaluation data will be in the form of a narrative, and you will have to explain why you were unable to use a formal or standardized evaluation. It is recommended that you use evaluation data from a variety of professionals, working as part of a transdisciplinary team to collect the most appropriate information.

13. For students with more involved disabilities, can a physical therapist's evaluation be used to determine PE placement?

Physical therapy is a related service, and physical therapists are responsible for providing support to the education curriculum. When a student with a severe disability needs to be evaluated for PE, it is recommended that the APE specialist and the physical therapist work together on the evaluation and write a transdisciplinary IEP. In this way, the physical therapist supports and assists with the APE specialist's direct educational services, which will help ensure the most appropriate placement.

14. How can I get training to administer the evaluation?

Request training from your director of special education or regional education service center. Once your school district determines the appropriate test, contact other districts that use this particular test and university programs that prepare students in the area of APE; they should have qualified individuals who can train school personnel to use a specific instrument to evaluate and program students with disabilities. It is recommended that a

school district provide general in-service training on the availability of tests to evaluate students with various disabilities, then select appropriate instruments for the district.

15. How often should a student be evaluated?

Once students are identified under IDEA as special-education students, they can be evaluated in three basic ways. The first is through a referral, which can come from any professional or parent who believes there is a significant motor delay in a child's physical-activity skills. Based on this referral, the student should be screened, and then a decision should be made on whether to complete a formal evaluation. Second, if the student with a disability is transferring from another school district where he or she was receiving APE services, the APE specialist should re-evaluate this student with formal and informal evaluations. Remember, not all school districts have the same placement criteria. Finally, a student with a disability who is already in APE needs to be evaluated every three years unless the IEP committee determines that no further evaluations are needed.

16. Once the assessment is complete, how do you determine if the student qualifies for APE?

Neither the federal nor the state government provides standards for placement. Each school district must choose its own test instruments and standards for placement. In doing so, consider two factors: students who fall 1.5 standard deviations below the mean and the least restrictive environment.

17. How often should a student receive APE?

A rule of thumb is that students with disabilities should receive the same number of minutes of PE per week as their non-disabled peers. The extent of services provided is based on the evaluation and the recommendation of the IEP committee. The appropriate service-delivery model depends on the student's needs. For example, a student with autism may need and receive general PE services once a week and APE services twice a week. In some cases, students may only need a para-educator to function safely and successfully in general PE, or they may need an APE consultant to talk to the general physical educator at the beginning of each new unit. Most students with disabilities have the skills and competencies to function in a general PE class and thus would receive the same amount of PE as their peers; hence they would not require specialized PE. Again, this is based on the student's needs, not on availability of services, facilities, convenience, staffing requirements, or equipment.

18. Who writes the IEP objectives, and who is responsible for implementation?

The goals and objectives should be written by the professionals who will be designing the student's educational program. If the student will be receiving only APE services in a segregated environment (one on one or in a small group), the APE specialist should write the goals and objectives for the IEP. On the other hand, if the student is going into the general PE environment, the goals and objectives should be written by the professionals working with the student (e.g. the general and adapted physical educators). It needs to be clear that these are only recommendations; the IEP committee makes final decisions on which goals and objectives are approved.

19. Who is responsible for writing modifications for PE?

Modifications should come from the IEP committee in collaboration with professionals involved with the student. Ideally, partnerships between the general physical educator and adapted physical educator, with recommendations from other members of the IEP

committee, would produce the appropriate modifications and adaptations. Activities should always be safe and successful.

20. What should I do if APE is the best placement for the student but the parents insist on general PE?

Try to understand why the parents would prefer the student to be in general PE. Compile evaluation and observational data that show the needs of the student. Prepare to explain clearly and concisely why APE would be the least restrictive environment for the student. In many cases, this involves educating the IEP team about the educational content of the setting you are prescribing. If the parents continue to believe APE is not the most appropriate placement for their child, they have the right to a due-process hearing. If the voting members of the IEP committee support the parents' position, the APE teacher should mark "Disagree" on the IEP papers and attach a statement of the disagreement with the reasons for his or her professional opinion.

21. What if I, the APE specialist, recommend general PE and in my absence my decision is reversed in the IEP meeting?

You should attend all IEP meetings, if possible. In your absence, the IEP team can decide which recommendation to implement. As an APE specialist, you should be clear about the evaluation outcomes and the rationale for placement. The more documentation you can send to the IEP meeting, the better the chances of appropriate student placement. If you suspect that your decision will be changed, be present.

22. What if I need a para-educator to accompany a student into the general PE environment?

Include a request for a para-educator in the IEP meeting. Specify the need for this para-educator if the student is to receive an appropriate education experience within the general PE environment. Your request will be stronger if you can base this need on documented formal or informal observational data. Specify what the para-educator's role will be and how it will increase the effectiveness of communication, teaching modifications, behavior-management techniques, the use of skill task cards, etc. Take time during planning to include the para-educator; assist this person in making modifications; and let him or her know what your expectations are.

23. How can I be included in the IEP meetings?

Submit a request in writing to the director of special education, building administrator, and diagnostician to be allowed to attend a specific IEP meeting to address a student's PE programming needs, particularly if a clear placement decision is not obvious.

24. Does a student in general PE come with an IEP?

All students with disabilities identified under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) must have individual education programs. If they are receiving APE services, they must have APE individual education plans (IEPs) within these programs. Based on revisions of IDEA, the regular physical educator must be involved in the IEP process if the student may be placed in the general PE environment. It is a professional courtesy for an APE teacher to give the general PE teacher a copy of the IEP when they are working with the same student, especially if the APE teacher is unable to attend the IEP meeting.

25. Can physical therapy substitute for APE?

No. Physical therapy is a related service. It supports direct educational instruction, such as

PE. It can supplement and complement PE but can never replace it.

26. Can a student receive both general and adapted PE?

Yes. Students can receive any configuration of general PE and APE as long as they receive the same number of minutes as their non-disabled peers. Students at the secondary level are only required to receive the same number of credits as their non-disabled peers.

27. Is it acceptable to place a student in general PE and occasionally have the student go to APE to work on particular skills?

Yes. The service-delivery model is determined based on the evaluation and recommendation of the IEP committee. It is acceptable practice for a student to leave the general PE class to work one on one with an APE specialist to refine a skill. This is one of the original philosophies supporting inclusion. “Based in, not confined to” means a student attends general PE but may temporarily leave that environment if it is beneficial for the student to do so. Besides one-on-one work with an APE specialist, alternatives might include traveling into the natural environment, where opportunities for incidental learning abound. An example would be for students to leave a high school golf class once a week to go to a golf course in the community, where they must coordinate transportation and other skills that pertain to the natural environment.

28. Can a student in general PE work on separate tasks with a para-educator?

Keep in mind inclusion and segregation. If students without disabilities are also working on separate tasks, and if some of them are grouped with the student with the disability, and if all students rotate frequently, you have inclusion. If the student with the disability and the para-educator are placed off to the side, away from the other students, who are grouped as a class, that is segregation. Still, in some cases the IEP committee may decide that this instructional model is an appropriate placement in the least restrictive environment.

29. Where can I get activities for students with disabilities?

One of the philosophies supporting inclusion is that we adapt the existing curriculum. Activities you already know and new activities you gather through research and attendance at professional meetings can easily be adapted to fit the needs of all students with disabilities.

30. How can a student with a disability meet the TEKS in general PE?

Just as any activity can be adapted, so can the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The TEKS are meant to be an educational framework for PE. The method by which you pursue each objective is determined by the student’s disability. Based on the DEC in Texas, “Students for whom some or all of the TEKS for physical education are not appropriate will need an adapted physical education evaluation. The goals and objectives for physical education should be developed as a result of the evaluation. They may include modified TEKS or unique goals specific to the student’s needs.”

31. Where can I get the money for equipment?

“Flow-through money” is distributed federally through IDEA and eventually is available to local education agencies. This allows each local school district to purchase unique equipment that will help students to function in various educational environments. If the

IEP committee decides the student needs adapted equipment to function successfully in an educational environment, such as PE, this equipment should be purchased with special-education funds.

32. How do I get the space and facilities I need to teach my APE class?

You have at least two options when confronted with space and facility needs. The first is to request that the director of special education coordinate with the building principal to provide adequate teaching facilities. The second is to work through the IEP team to coordinate the needs of APE classes. Collaborate with the general PE teacher to find an appropriate teaching station. All requests should be submitted in writing.

33. How many students with disabilities can be placed in my general PE class?

We are trying to create natural environments for all students. Based on IDEA, 12 percent of the school-age population is considered disabled. Most of these students have mild disabilities. It is extremely important to consider the severity of the disability in determining who can appropriately be educated in a general PE class without harming the education of other students. In addition, we need to consider our support systems, such as para-educators, who can assist with safe and appropriate placement in general PE classes, as is done in special education classes.

34. How do I keep students with disabilities from getting hurt in my PE classes?

Avoid inappropriate activities, such as dodge ball. When appropriate, prepare all students in the class for additional safety considerations. A student should not be placed in a general PE class if there is a high probability of injury. The first step is to determine whether the likelihood of an injury can be decreased through modifications and accommodations. If this is not possible, the student's IEP committee should reconvene to determine a more appropriate placement.

35. What is atlantoaxial instability?

Atlantoaxial instability is greater-than-normal mobility between C1 and C2. Atlantoaxial instability can be diagnosed through an X-ray, and the results should be in the student's file. Special Olympics requires all athletes with Down syndrome to have this X-ray. School districts also require the X-ray to ensure that students will not be injured in PE activities. Contraindicated activities – such as a headstand, forward roll, high jump, butterfly stroke or any other activity that might jolt or place stress on the neck – could sever the student's spinal column.

36. What is an ecological inventory?

An ecological inventory is an evaluation of a community in which a student with a disability will live and seek recreational activities. The inventory should focus on the student's abilities and interests in relation to his or her present as well as future environments. The key is deciding which future activities the student will most likely enjoy and find successful participation in. This inventory should cover all recreational/leisure possibilities, expenses, equipment needs, transportation availability, and skills necessary to participate.

37. What is community-based programming?

Community-based programming begins once you have evaluated the recreational/leisure possibilities of the student's community. This programming should focus on the student's capacities and desires. Ask the student which activities he or she enjoys or might be interested in learning. Pay close attention to which activities the family enjoys together.

Evaluate the student to see which skills are in place and which skills must be learned in order for him or her to be an active participant. By the time the student is 14, these activities should be addressed in the recreational portion of an individualized transition plan (ITP).

38. Should secondary students receive APE until they graduate?

Students with disabilities are required to receive the same number of credits as their non-disabled peers. The community recreational needs of secondary students should be addressed in the life-skills curriculum. Students' recreational pursuits must also be addressed in their ITPs. If the IEP committee believes it is appropriate, a student with a disability may continue to receive APE services throughout the high school years, even if no other student in the school is provided this opportunity. Again, the decision is based on the needs of the student with the disability.

39. What is the ITP?

The individualized transition plan is designed to identify the services a student needs to make a successful transition to adult life after graduation. The ITP is a plan of action to ensure that the student has the necessary vocational, independent-living, and recreation skills and possibilities to function within his or her environment. IDEA requires that a student's IEP begin addressing transition service needs by age 14 and provide a statement of needed transition services by age 16. In Texas, the ITP should begin at age 14 or earlier.

40. What role does the PE specialist play in the development of the ITP?

General PE teachers address the lifetime PE skills of all students in Texas based on the TEKS. For students with disabilities whose skills cannot be addressed through the TEKS (e.g. students who may be in life skills), adaptations and modifications are necessary. The general PE teacher needs to be involved in some aspect of the ITP program development, in collaboration with the IEP committee, to ensure appropriate programming in lifetime physical-activity skills. Although recreation is addressed in the life-skills curriculum, the certified PE specialist plays a major role in recognizing opportunities in the community and identifying the skills the student needs to participate successfully. It is recommended that the PE specialist participate in the development of the ITP.

41. What should I do with a student whose behavior is disruptive to the general PE class?

Ask yourself these questions: Does the child have a behavior intervention plan (BIP)? Who is the behavior specialist in your school district? What does the special education teacher offer as a solution? Do you need a para-educator to accompany this student into the general PE setting?

42. What is a BIP?

A behavior intervention plan contains strategies for addressing specific behaviors exhibited by a student that interfere with his or her performance or the learning of others. This plan must include consequences, rewards and educational support to improve the student's performance and learning. This plan is designed and implemented by the IEP committee.

43. As a general PE teacher, what should I do if no information comes with the student regarding disability, BIP, modifications, etc.?

Inform the education diagnostician that you need this information. Although it is confidential, anyone who is employed by the school district and provides services to a

student has access to that student's file. Most likely, the file will be on the student's campus. The person providing PE services for students with disabilities should review each student's folder to determine physical and motor indications and contraindications. Professionals who have not been trained to provide PE services may be unable to identify red flags that could impact on providing an appropriate program within the medical margin of safety.

44. When TEA visits our district, what will the monitors be looking for in APE/inclusion in general PE?

Is the student in general PE? Is the student involved in activities with peers in general PE? Are the TEKS being modified for the student? Is the student receiving the same number of minutes as non-disabled peers? Is the student in APE? Is there a standardized evaluation on file? Are goals and measurable objectives on file? Does the student have the equipment and personnel to be successful?

45. What is the difference between adapted physical education and adaptive physical education?

Adapted physical education is the proper term, used in federal and state guidelines and in all current major texts, journals, and Internet sites in the field. The basic idea is that service delivery is adapted, while behaviors are adaptive. Hence, we definitely are adapted physical educators.