The Individualized Education Program and Inclusive Physical Education

Every child who receives special education services will have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). An IEP is a legal document describing the educational program and related services required to meet a child’s individual needs to make academic progress. The IEP has two general purposes: to set reasonable learning goals for a student and to state the services that the school district will provide to that student. Even though a student’s IEP may not contain goals and objectives that pertain to physical education, it will still contain essential information that can direct the teacher in developing and implementing individualized educational programs.

A student must meet two requirements to have an IEP:

- **Have one or more of the 14 specific categories of disabilities listed in IDEA.** They include Autism, Deaf-Blindness, Deafness, Developmental Delay, Emotional Disturbance, Hearing Impairment, Intellectual Disability, Multiple Disabilities, Orthopedic Impairment, Other Health Impairment, Specific Learning Disability, Speech or Language Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury and Visual Impairment, including blindness (“Welcome to the U.S. Department of Education”, n.d.).

- **The disability must adversely affect the child’s educational performance and/or ability to learn and benefit from the general education curriculum.**

The IEP Includes:

The IEP Team

IEPs are written by the IEP “team” which can include: Child Study Team members, general education teachers, special education teachers, school psychologists, related service providers, such as physical therapists, occupational therapists or speech therapists, parents/guardians, physical education teachers and arts educators or other elective teachers.

Since physical education is a required part of the educational program by law, physical education teachers should be included on the IEP team. Teachers who participate in writing an IEP statement will be asked to assess a student’s strengths and areas of need. These annual and ongoing assessments should be used to determine the student’s Present Level(s) of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP). The IEP is based on current and accurate information on the student’s strengths and needs, including how the child’s disability affects her involvement and progress in the general education curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for nondisabled children). This may or may not include physical development (“Regulations”, n.d.).

- **Assessments** should be both functional and academic. Assessments should be used to determine the student’s level of performance, to outline how the student learns and to identify the challenges and conditions that impact his learning. Assessments in physical education can include fitness, motor skills, sports skills, participation behaviors and cognitive assessments. The assessment can be a standardized, norm referenced test, a teacher constructed test and/or anecdotal notes.

- **Annual goals and objectives** for specific areas and how they will be measured and implemented. The physical education teacher selects goals that are related to the physical education curriculum.

- **Where the student will receive the services** can include one or a combination of in-class support, individual or small group, or inclusion within the general physical education setting. Also includes who will deliver the services and the frequency of the services.

- **Modifications, accommodations, and supplementary aids and supports** required to meet the student’s needs such as assistive technology, equipment modifications, additional time for testing, behavior management plans, one-on-one support or content modifications.

- **Progress reports** that describe how and when progress will be measured and shared. Designates the goals, progress, frequency of reporting and assessment and other information specific to the student.

The IEP Meeting

Each student’s IEP team meets a minimum of once per year to discuss the student’s present abilities, needs for learning in all areas of development, and to revise and update the IEP to reflect ongoing assessments and the student’s changing strengths and needs. The IEP may be periodically reviewed if requested by the administrator, educators, Child Study Team or parent/guardian.

The Document

Describing the following components:

- **The student’s current educational status** or Present Level(s) of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP). The IEP is based on current and accurate information on the student’s strengths and needs, including how the child’s disability affects her involvement and progress in the general education curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for nondisabled children). This may or may not include physical development (“Regulations”, n.d.).

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EXAMPLE of PLAAFP STATEMENT

and GOALS

Static Balance Test: Ray, a 6 year old student, was able to balance on his right foot for 3 seconds and his left for 2 seconds. On the test scoring rubric he performed at the Low Balance Ability level which is 0-4 seconds for his age level. Ray needed assistance by holding his hand to help him stand on one foot to begin the test.

Annual Goal: By the scheduled annual review, Ray will increase his static balance score by 5 seconds on each foot placing him in the Moderate Balance Ability level which is 5-10 seconds without assistance in the beginning of the test.

Collaboration with Others

Inclusion for students with disabilities is most effective when educators collaborate to ensure that each student receives an equal opportunity to be involved in all school programs and events. This requires professionals to communicate with each other about the student’s needs for involvement and achievement and how they can work together to help the student be successful and fully accepted.

Tips for Using the IEP in the Physical Education Program

• In the beginning of the school year ask the school administrator, special education or Child Study Team for access to the IEPs for the students in your classes.
• Meet with the student’s classroom teachers, special education or Child Study Team members, and other educators such as the physical therapist, occupational therapist and adapted physical education teacher, to discuss teaching strategies you can apply in your classes.
• Regularly assess student learning to adjust the instruction plan as needed.

Confidential Information

Although the information in an IEP is helpful, it is also confidential. According the Unified Federation of Teachers (UFT), “The Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) allows schools to disclose personally identifiable information in a student’s education records, including the student’s IEP, to school personnel with “legitimate educational interests” (“Copies of IEP’s”, n.d.).

While an IEP contains important instructional information that teachers, related service providers, paraeducators and administrators involved in the student’s education need to know, it may also contain sensitive personal information about the student that might not be accessible to all. Teachers and related service providers who have access to IEPs must ensure that the student’s IEP remains confidential and is not disclosed to other people. Most schools have strict procedures for reviewing an IEP. Consult your special education team, Child Study Team or administrator about access to a student’s IEP.

Collaboration Strategies

• Talk with your administrator about the importance of your participation in all phases of the IEP process (assessment, team meetings, goal writing and progress reports.)
• Attend the IEP team meetings to offer essential information about the student’s fitness and skill development, and advocate for modifications to succeed in the curriculum content.
• Share outcomes from your student assessments in the areas of motor skills, sports skills and physical fitness so appropriate IEP goals can be written.
• Share success stories to keep the other teachers and school administrators informed on how students with disabilities have been successfully included in the general physical education classes and other school clubs and events.
• Communicate with teachers who have your students in their classes and ask about behavior plans, communication strategies and tips on how to maintain focus and improve learning.
• Collaborate with related service professionals such as the physical therapist, occupational therapist or other professionals who provide services to the student. Ask about strategies, equipment, adaptations, motivators that can be incorporated into the physical education program. If possible invite these professionals to attend a physical education class to offer suggestions for successful inclusion.
Know Your Team Members

- **Special education classroom teachers** will be your greatest resource. Ask questions about specific students, their learning styles, their interests, behavior plans and adaptations needed.

- **Child Study Team** members will help with access to IEPs, interpreting goals and required adaptations, getting adaptive and other equipment or modifications you need, and will be your contact with the Special Services Administration.

- **School nurse** will discuss any health issues and limitations that a student might have and possibilities for learning in the physical education class to improve overall health.

- **School social worker/guidance counselor** can offer guidance and strategies on social/emotional, psychological and behavioral issues.

- **Occupational therapist** will help with modifications of equipment, adaptive resources and strategies for teaching and developing gross and fine motor skills.

- **Physical therapist** will help with understanding the physical needs and challenges of students and the selection of adapted equipment, especially for students who require assistance to gain mobility within the physical education setting.

- **Speech therapist** will help you understand the best ways to communicate with students. This might be with one word, small phrases, using a communication book or assistive device, pictures and other techniques.

- **Behavior therapist** will discuss a student’s behavior plan. It is very important that you understand how the plan works and who is implementing it. Following the plan is critical to a student’s success. If a plan needs to be modified in physical education class, it needs to be discussed and agreed upon first.

- **Administrators** are decision-makers and can be very helpful. Maintain regular communication with all administrators in physical education, special services and your building as needed to ensure they are aware of what you are doing to include students with disabilities. This will enable them to better understand and support you.

- **Parents/guardians** are part of the Child Study Team and know the student best. Whenever possible, communicate with parents/guardians about what their children are doing in class. Send home notes or emails. Encourage practice at home. Parents/guardians can be your best advocates.

- **Other physical education teachers** are an important resource. Set up quarterly meetings to discuss Inclusive Physical Education programs within the school. Discuss what is and isn’t working, obstacles and successes. Share ideas on equipment modifications, class organization or support from paraeducators and peers.

- **Your students** are also your teammates. Students with and without disabilities will gladly share what is and isn’t working, and have great ideas for making the activities a success for everyone. They have insightful suggestions to modify activities to include all students.

- **Arts/electives/other educators/sports coaches** can offer information from their interactions with the students and observations of the student in an inclusive setting. They may offer a strategy or idea that can help a student to be successfully included in an activity or game.
Diagram 2. All staff and administration involved in a student’s education program should be considered part of the team to support a PE teacher in delivering a quality Inclusive Physical Education program.