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*Updated Guidance on
Adapted Physical Education*

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UPDATED GUIDANCE ON ADAPTED PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Educators can receive a specialty endorsement after demonstrating specific skills and knowledge in a highly specialized area of instruction. Specialty endorsements can appear on an educator's certificate and provide visibility and evidence of their professional preparation and learning accomplishments.

In September 2023, on the recommendations of the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB), Adapted Physical Education (APE) was approved to be added as a specialty endorsement.¹ Effective May 1, 2024, teachers with any special education endorsement or Health/Fitness endorsement are now eligible to add the APE specialty endorsement² to their certificate. Possession of the APE specialty endorsement demonstrates that an educator has completed a PESB approved preparation program and obtained specific skills and knowledge in both Physical Education Learning Standards and special education core competencies.

This policy change³ is significant, as educators who obtain the APE specialty endorsement will be fully qualified in Washington to provide specially designed instruction (SDI) and fulfill the other duties of a special educator when appropriate. As a result, the APE specialty endorsement will also be included as one of the special education endorsement options. The updated list of these options includes:

- Special education endorsement
- Early childhood special education endorsement
- Deaf education endorsement
- Deaf education with American Sign Language (ASL) proficiency endorsement
- Teacher of the visually impaired (TOVI) endorsement
- Adapted Physical Education (APE) (**New Specialty Endorsement**)

To align with this change, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) anticipates revising [WAC 392-172A-02090\(1\)\(i\)](#) in the future to reflect the inclusion of APE as a special education certification option. The current state rules, however, already require special education staff to be appropriately qualified as required by PESB for their particular position of employment.⁴ If you have feedback or questions about this revision, please email [OSPI Special Education](#) and use the subject line "APE."

The content within this updated guidance is intended to replace the previously published Tip on APE from April 2018.

For more information about the APE specialty endorsement, refer to the [PESB Endorsement webpage](#).

¹ [PESB Summary of Actions/Annotations for the September 2023 Board Meeting \(see tab 11\)](#).

² [PESB Summary of Actions/Annotations for the March 2024 Board Meeting \(see tab 11\)](#).

³ [WAC 181-82A-208](#)

⁴ [WAC 181-82A-208](#) and [WAC 392-172A-02090\(1\)\(a\)](#) establish APE as a specialty endorsement option.

WHAT IS ADAPTED PHYSICAL EDUCATION?

Physical education (PE) services, specially designed, if necessary, must be made available to every child with a disability receiving free appropriate public education (FAPE).⁵

Adapted physical education (APE) is SDI in PE that is designed on an individual basis to meet the unique needs of a student with a disability. APE is a special education service and is therefore outlined in a student's IEP based on the results of the student's special education evaluation. If a student's IEP identifies an annual goal related to PE, APE is one method of providing SDI to support the student in reaching that goal.

A student with an IEP may receive services related to PE without requiring APE services. The IEP team must consider the student's evaluation data and LRE to determine if APE services are the most appropriate way to meet the student's unique needs. School teams are always obligated to ensure their general education PE instruction and learning environments are accessible to all students, including students with disabilities. However, for a student whose individual needs necessitate APE, the guidance in this document can support teams to ensure all requirements related to personnel qualifications and special education are met.

While the terms **adapted** and **adaptive** physical education are sometimes used interchangeably, the correct term in the educational setting for students receiving modified PE instruction is adapted physical education. Adaptive is most often utilized to describe adult-led modifications like modified sports equipment like 'sit skis' or trikes to support athletes with disabilities to perform in fitness and sport.⁶

Special Education Staffing Guidance: WAC 392-172A-02090 Personnel Qualification

The following information is intended to assist districts and school teams in understanding the staffing options available to them under [WAC 392-172A-02090 Personnel Qualifications](#) concerning the newly added APE specialty endorsement option.

[WAC 392-172A02090\(1\)\(i\)](#) details the requirement that special education and related services must be provided by appropriately qualified staff:

(i) Special education and related services must be provided by appropriately qualified staff. Other staff including general education teachers and paraeducators may assist in the provision of special education and related services, provided that the instruction is designed and supervised by special education certificated staff..., or for related services by a certificated educational staff associate.

⁵ [IDEA Sec. 300.108](#)

⁶ Hutzler, Y., & Hellerstein, D. (2016). Adapted Versus Adaptive Physical Activity. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 33(2), 109–112. Retrieved January 5, 2024, from [Adapted Versus Adaptive Physical Activity](#).

If special education instruction is being provided by "other staff" who are assisting, OSPI recommends that districts adopt a method for documenting how the design and supervision of that instruction is done by appropriately qualified special education certificated staff.

Educators holding any of the special education endorsements listed below are considered to possess "substantial professional training" under WAC 392-172A-02090(1)(b). This permits these staff to independently design, provide, evaluate, and monitor SDI for a student, author the Individualized Education Program (IEP), and serve as the special educator in an IEP meeting when **appropriate:**

- Special education endorsement
- Early childhood special education endorsement
- Deaf education endorsement
- Deaf education with American Sign Language (ASL) proficiency endorsement
- Teacher of the visually impaired (TOVI) endorsement
- Adapted Physical Education (APE) specialty endorsement (**NEW)

The IEP team must consider the unique needs of the student to determine the appropriate provider for services such as APE, as well as the location, frequency, and duration of such services.

When determining the provider for APE services in the IEP, the IEP team can consider each of the options that appropriately qualify a provider, including the newly added APE specialty endorsement. While not a requirement for an educator, obtaining an APE specialty endorsement is one way for an educator to demonstrate enhanced competency in PE instruction adapted for individual students eligible for special education services in PE.

APE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q1: Who can provide APE instruction?

If a student needs SDI in PE, then that PE instruction, like all SDI, must be designed, supervised, evaluated, and monitored by an appropriately qualified and certificated special education staff member. The IEP team decides, based on the unique needs of the student, who the appropriate provider is, as well as the location, frequency, and duration of APE services.

Educators qualified to provide SDI in the area of APE could include:

- 1) an educator with the APE specialty endorsement,
- 2) 2) any other appropriately qualified special education endorsed teacher, and
- 3) 3) an appropriately qualified Educational Staff Associate (ESA) such as an Occupational Therapist (OT) or a Physical Therapist (PT).

It is important for the evaluation team and IEP team to center on a student's individual needs when considering the approach and expertise of a provider in determining who is the appropriately qualified provider and what type of service a student may require.

To learn more about special education qualifications (i.e., who is appropriately qualified to provide special education and related services to students as outlined on an IEP), refer to the [Personnel Qualifications Guidance website](#) and [WAC 392-172A-02090\(i\)](#).

Q2: How can a teacher obtain an APE Specialty Endorsement?

On September 29, 2023, the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) [approved](#) Tab 11 to add the APE specialty endorsement to Washington state's certification system. Board materials regarding this decision can be found [here](#).

Certificated teachers who hold any special education endorsement or a Health/Fitness endorsement are eligible to add the APE specialty endorsement to their certificate. The APE specialty endorsement provides professional recognition on the teacher's certificate that they have met the essential learnings for APE, which includes specific skills and knowledge in both PE Learning Standards and special education core competencies.

Eligible teachers may add the APE specialty endorsement by completing a PESB-approved preparation program that offers this specialty endorsement. APE specialty endorsements could be earned through any state-approved program (including out-of-state programs).

There are currently no programs approved to offer this endorsement, but PESB anticipates programs beginning to apply for approval in spring 2024. Teachers can find which programs offer which endorsements by using PESB's [Find an endorsement offering](#) tool.

- Once programs begin offering the APE specialty endorsement, interested teachers will need to reach out to the program they are interested in to find out more. Programs will recommend teachers who successfully complete their program to OSPI's certification office.

After being recommended by their program, teachers should apply with OSPI's certification office for the endorsement.

It is important to note that, while various educators may be qualified to provide SDI in the area of APE, only educators holding a teacher certificate may be the teacher of record ([WAC 181-79A-140](#) and [WAC 181-79A-030](#)). [WAC 181-79A-140](#) authorized educators holding an administrator or educational staff associate (ESA) certificate to serve in specific educator roles, none of which include serving as a classroom teacher.

Q3: In what ways can a PE teacher provide or support APE Instruction for a student?

For a certificated PE teacher to independently provide SDI in APE, that teacher would need to have an appropriate special education endorsement under [WAC 392-172A-02090\(i\)](#). One option for a special education endorsement could include having the APE specialty endorsement (**See Q1 and Q2 for more information**).

A PE teacher without a special education endorsement is not able to independently provide SDI related to PE. They can, however, **assist** in the provision of SDI, provided that the SDI is designed and supervised by appropriately qualified special education certificated staff.⁷

The starting point for any IEP team discussion about the least restrictive environment (LRE) to provide SDI in APE is going to be the general education setting for many students. As an example, an appropriately qualified special educator or Educational Staff Associate (ESA) could either join the general education environment to provide services to the student directly or they could design, supervise, evaluate, and monitor the instruction for the general education PE teacher or another staff to provide. (**See Q4 for more information on supporting inclusion in PE**).

Q4: How can schools and staff support inclusive instruction for all students in PE?

School districts and PE teachers should make every effort to offer PE instruction that is universally designed⁸ to be accessible for all students to make progress in the [Physical Education K–12 Learning Standards](#). The school environment may be the only place some students have access to quality physical activity. Additionally, PE confers many benefits on students with and without disabilities alike, including social emotional learning (SEL), compassion for others, and obtaining the skills necessary to participate in physical fitness and personal athletic interests.

PE instruction in the general education environment is going to be the LRE for most students. PE teachers can support all students in making progress in the learning standards by:

- Providing multiple ways for students to engage in the standards and demonstrate mastery of the standards.
- Collaborating with the IEP team to learn what annual goals, accommodations, modifications, and instructional methods are included in the IEP to best support the student.

⁷ [WAC 392-172A-02090\(1\)\(i\)](#)

⁸ Learn more about [UDL Guidelines from CAST](#).

- Expanding the availability and use of equipment that support engagement and learning, such as variable height basketball hoops, batting tee inserts, or feet markers.⁹
- Meeting in professional learning communities (PLCs) to focus on best practices in inclusive instruction.
- Deepening practices to ensure that the school environment and structure supports student belonging and participation in PE. (**See Q6 for more information**).

The availability of APE services in a district does not mean that all students with disabilities will require SDI in PE in a separate special education setting, nor does it mean that students with disabilities are no longer included in general education PE spaces.

Schools may want to rethink requirements for “dressing out” or locker room usage and create more inclusive practices, such as offering different levels of PE classes to attract more students. Strict policies on “dressing out” for PE can create barriers for student participation in PE.

The IEP team is tasked with determining the support needed for a student to access the general education curriculum in their LRE based on the results of the student’s comprehensive evaluation. For a student with extensive support needs, the IEP team may wish to consider additional services to support the student in accessing PE instruction in their LRE. The practice of excusing students from PE due to disability, while permitted under [RCW 28A.230.040](#), should only be considered after other alternatives have been fully explored.

Q5: If a student’s IEP includes APE, does that automatically mean they are in an APE class?

APE is a service identified on a student’s IEP based on the IEP team’s consideration of the student’s needs and comprehensive evaluation data.

The LRE to provide SDI in APE is likely going to be the general education setting for many students. For example, APE services can be provided within the general education PE course or be provided within a specific APE class.

If the evaluation group determines that the student requires APE services, then the student’s IEP should include present levels and measurable annual goals for PE, as well as the frequency, location, and duration of services in that area. The IEP should also specify the supplementary aids and services and/or modifications if determined to be needed to meet the student’s needs.

For students with disabilities, a continuum of placement options may include one or more of the following:

- **General PE with/without accommodations:** The student attends with same-age peers with or without accommodations. The only changes to the curriculum, instruction, equipment, assessment methods, or supports would be accommodations required for the student to participate, be successful, and make progress in the general curriculum.
 - An example of accommodation could be allowing a student to change the distance of a target.

⁹ [Guidelines for Facilities, Equipment, Instructional Materials & Technology in K–12 Physical Education Page 22–23](#), SHAPE America.

- **General PE with supplementary aids and services¹⁰ and/or modification:**¹¹ The student attends PE with same age peers and needs additional supports (supplemental aids and services and/or modifications) to participate, be successful, and make progress in the general curriculum.
 - An example of supplementary aids and services or modifications could include the use of an individualized warm up routine prescribed by a physical therapist (PT), adapted equipment, mobility aids, paraeducator support, or a peer partner in the PE class.
- **SDI in APE:** If a student is not making progress in the general curriculum with accommodations, supplementary aids and services, and/or modifications, then specially designed APE may be indicated. SDI in APE requires substantial adaptation of the curriculum or special curriculum development, individualization of instructional strategies, substantial equipment modifications and set up, and collaboration with special education and/or related service providers. The student's PE program and environment is tailored to the student's needs in the areas of motor development, play, fitness, recreation, and lifetime leisure. SDI in APE could be provided in a general education PE course or could be in a separate APE course.
- **Separate facility:** In limited circumstances, a student may attend PE in a separate facility.¹²

For students with more significant support needs, best practice would be to include a team approach or service delivery model where general PE teachers, special education teachers, and/or Educational Staff Associates (ESAs) work collaboratively to meet the unique needs of the students.

Q6: What are some considerations when supporting a school environment for PE instruction that is accessible and supports belonging for all students?

According to [SHAPE America](#), school teams are encouraged to consider a variety of factors to ensure an inclusive learning environment for all students. These factors include:

- **Accessibility of physical spaces:** All physical spaces, including indoor and outdoor activity spaces, locker rooms, and any other spaces used for PE routines and activities, should be accessible to students with a variety of abilities and needs. Drinking fountains and/or water bottle filling stations should be nearby and accessible for all students.
- **Flooring:** Surfaces should be safe, clean, and in good repair. Floor markings should be clear to students, and temporary floor tape and other markings should be removed when no longer needed.

¹⁰ [WAC 392-172A-01185](#)

¹¹ [WAC 392-172A-03090](#)

¹² Per [WAC 392-172A-02030](#), for students enrolled full-time in a separate facility, the school district responsible for the education of a student must ensure that the student receives appropriate physical education services.

- **Acoustics:** To ensure all students can hear instruction, schools can design indoor spaces with acoustical treatment to improve sound quality and provide wireless microphones to teachers.
- **Instruction:** Teachers can deliver instruction in a variety of methods and can enhance instruction with visual and/or auditory cues, gestures, or videos to support learning. Teachers can make other adjustments, such as to the activity rules or the size of student groups, to ensure that all students' needs are considered.

For more recommendations to ensure PE is inclusive of all students, refer to SHAPE America's guidance document [Guidelines for Facilities, Equipment, Instructional Materials & Technology in K–12 Physical Education](#).

Q7: Who can I reach out to if I still have questions?

- **Questions on certification policy and on the APE specialty endorsement** are best directed to the Professional Educators Standard Board (PESB) at [PESB's email](#).
- **Questions about certification requirements, applications, and implications** are best directed to the OSPI Certification Office. You can [submit a question to certification](#) or call them at 360-725-6400.
- **Questions about Health and PE guidance, learning standards, or best practices** are best directed to Ken Turner at [Ken Turner's Email](#). Guidance on this topic can also be found on the [Health and Physical Education](#) webpage.
- **Questions about the special education personnel qualifications for special education services or guidance on IEP development and implementation** are best directed to the Special Education department. You can email your question to [Special Education email](#) or call 360-725-6075.

Q8: What resources can support school and PE teachers to provide rigorous, accessible physical education instruction for all students?

Health and PE teach students that good health and safety principles can lead to a lifetime of healthy practices, resulting in more productive, active, and successful lives. The OSPI webpage for [Health and Physical Education](#) contains information about the learning standards, state assessment models, school health profiles, including guidance and other resources.

Additional resources developed outside of OSPI on the topics of APE and unified PE include:

- [Adapted Physical Education Best Practices Guidebook, Utah State Board of Education \(2023\)](#)
- [Alabama Adapted Physical Education Best Practices, Alabama Department of Education \(2021\)](#)
- [Unified Physical Education Resources \(2nd ed.\), Special Olympics \(2019\)](#)
- [Adapted Physical Education Resources for Teachers Toolbox, SHAPE America](#)
- [Guidelines for Facilities, Equipment, Instructional Materials & Technology in K–12 Physical Education, SHAPE America](#)

- [Teaching Resources for Practitioners, The National Consortium for Physical Education for Individuals with Disabilities](#)

Additional resources that provide additional information and clarification about PE services for students with disabilities include:

- [Creating equal opportunities for students and youth with disabilities to participate in physical education and extracurricular athletics \(pdf\)](#) (August 2011): This guide from the U.S. Department of Education helps schools and school districts include students with disabilities in physical education classes and after school sports. The guide has information about Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requirements to include students with disabilities in physical education.
- [Dear Colleague Letter](#) (January 25, 2013): The U.S. Department of Education clarifies schools' obligation to provide equal opportunity to students with disabilities to participate in extracurricular athletics.

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