

Tips from the Special Education Division:

January 2025

Question: When the IEP team determines a student's participation in the general physical education setting, are they also determining the student's need for adapted physical education (APE)?

Answer:

No. Adapted physical education (APE) means specially designed instruction (SDI) in physical education (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 that, like all special education services, would be documented within the IEP and provided in the least restrictive environment. APE can thus be provided in both a general education PE setting as well as a special education PE setting. School teams, as a reminder, are always obligated to ensure their general education PE instruction and learning environments are accessible to all students.

Some IEP systems may contain checkboxes to indicate if a student will participate in the general PE program. This checkbox does not indicate that the student is receiving APE SDI and is also not a required field for IEPs to be comprehensive and compliant under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Washington Administrative Code (WAC).

If, however, districts and IEP teams choose to document the determination of whether a student will participate in the general PE program that is available to all students within an IEP, then the following guidance would apply:

*The general PE determination made by the IEP team is only intended to signify **whether the student is participating in the general PE program available to all students** (regardless of whether or not the student receives accommodations and/or SDI in that setting). The general PE determination in an IEP is **NOT** the IEP team's decision on whether APE SDI is determined to be needed.*



[WAC 392-172A-02030](#) outlines that all students¹ must be provided with the opportunity to participate in PE, specially designed if necessary. If a student can access the general PE curriculum with or without accommodations, modifications, or supplementary aids and services (SAS), then it would not be considered SDI. If a student is unable to access the general PE curriculum, even with accommodations, then the student may need APE.

The following decision tree may be helpful for IEP teams to make the determination about whether a student will be participating in the general PE program available to all students:

- IEP teams will select “Yes” if:
 - The student is participating in the general PE program available to all students, with or without accommodations, modifications, SAS, SDI and/or related services.
 - Note: Some students may participate in the general education PE program available to all students AND may also receive SDI or related services during physical education program time (e.g., SDI related to behavior, or physical therapy as a related service, etc.).
- IEP teams will select “No” if:
 - The student is not participating in the general PE program available to all students because the student was unable to access general PE instruction even with the assistance of accommodations, modifications, SAS, or SDI (if determined to be needed). The student will be accessing PE instruction in a separate special education setting and receiving APE as indicated in the student’s IEP.
 - Or the student is not participating in the general PE program available to all students because the student is enrolled full time in a separate facility.
 - Note: Per [WAC 392-172A-02030](#), the school district shall ensure that any student eligible for special education services who is enrolled in a separate facility will be provided with appropriate “physical education services.”

In summary, the general PE determination made by the IEP team should only be interpreted as an indicator of whether or not the student is participating in the general PE program available to all students. If an IEP team determines that a student requires APE, then that service would be detailed elsewhere within the IEP and could be provided within the general PE program or in a special education setting.

¹ [WAC 392-410-136](#) details that there are circumstances where a student may be excused from the PE requirement. Section 7 of the [Graduation Toolkit Class of 2024 FAQ](#) provides guidance related to the PE requirement for high school students.

Resources

The [Updated Guidance on Adapted Physical Education](#) by the OSPI Special Education Division provides detailed guidance for IEP teams on the continuum of placement options for PE, considerations for providing accessible and inclusive PE instruction, and guidance on APE as specially designed instruction.