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Press Release from the National Consortium on Physical Education and Recreation for Individuals with Disabilities (www.NCPERID.org)

U.S. Department of Education Releases Policy Clarifications on Physical Education and Extracurricular Athletics for Students with Disabilities

The Office of Special Education Programs in the U.S. Department of Education (Department) has issued an important policy clarification document that will impact positively on physical education opportunities for students with disabilities. [“Creating Equal Opportunities for Children and Youth to Participate in Physical Education and Extracurricular Athletics”](#) is an official initial response by the Department to the June 2010 U.S. Government Accountability Office ([GAO-10-519](#)) report that found “despite legislation obligating states and schools to provide equal access, opportunities for physical activity are limited for children and youth with disabilities.” The August, 2011 report addresses the GAO recommendation that “the Secretary of Education facilitate information sharing among states and schools on ways to provide opportunities in [physical education] PE and extracurricular athletics to students with disabilities.”

Garth Tymeson, Legislative Committee Co-Chair of the National Consortium on Physical Education and Recreation for Individuals with Disabilities (NCPERID), stated “this report provides much needed clarification for parents, teachers, and school administrators regarding the often confused physical education requirement for all students with disabilities that has longstanding roots in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This recognizes the importance of physical education for the lifelong health of all students with disabilities.”

The report highlights that “states and schools are required to provide equal opportunity to participate in physical education and extracurricular athletics by children and youth with and without disabilities.” The report also states that “the definition of special education in section 602(29) of the IDEA includes instruction in physical education. Marty Block, President of NCPERID, states “this report reaffirms the U.S. Department of Education’s longstanding support of physical education for children with disabilities.” Furthermore, the report “goes a long way in assuring physical education will continue to be part of future reauthorization of IDEA.”

The 20-page report contains a summary of suggestions to increase physical education and extracurricular athletic opportunities for students with disabilities including: accessibility, equipment, personnel preparation, teaching styles, management of behavior, program options, curriculum, and assessment strategies. Robert Arnhold, NCPERID Legislative Co-chair commented that “The Department has done a tremendous job identifying barriers to participation and provides effective suggestions and recommendations for increasing physical education and athletic participation opportunities for children with disabilities in the public schools. The focus areas they have addressed are some of the most critical and often requested areas for assistance and support by teachers and parents.”

More Guidance for Extracurricular Athletics Coming: The DOE report states that the Office of Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education will provide separate and additional guidance on the legal aspects of the provision of extracurricular athletic opportunities to students with disabilities to comply with the second major GAO recommendation to the Department in its original June 2010 report.

References:

U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). (2010, June). *Students with Disabilities: More Information and Guidance Could Improve Opportunities in Physical Education and Athletics*. Report to Congressional Requestors Number GAO-10-519. Washington, DC. Author. Available at www.gao.gov/products/GAO-10-519

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs, *Creating Equal Opportunities for Children and Youth to Participate in Physical Education and Extracurricular Athletics*, Washington, D.C., 2011. Available at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/equal-pe.pdf>