# Physical Education for Students with Visual Impairments

**A Position Paper of the Division on Visual Impairments**

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Physical activities, whether structured or recreational, are important in the lives of boys and girls, men and women. All people deserve formal and informal opportunities to fully develop physical skills and abilities. Children and youth who are visually impaired should have specific physical activities adapted when necessary to meet their individual needs at various growth and developmental stages; and they should have every opportunity to participate in physical activities with other children, including those who are sighted (Blessing, McCrimmin, & Stovill, 1993; Lieberman, Robinson, & Rollheiser, 2006; Stuart, Lieberman, & Hand, 2006).

Physical education is the development of motor skills and patterns through individual and group games, aquatics, dance, cooperative activities, and life-long recreational activities, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandates access to physical education for students with disabilities (IDEA, 2004, PL 108-446). It contributes to students’ cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development. Adapted physical education is defined as physical education modified to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities (Lieberman & Houston-Wilson, 2009). Adapted physical education instruction can be delivered in a variety of placements, including those found in both public and special school settings. The entire multidisciplinary team makes decisions about the specific needs of students with disabilities, taking into consideration factors such as fitness level, motor skills development, ability to be in large groups, social needs, and safety (Columna, Davis, Lieberman, & Lytle, 2010). There is no separate curriculum for children with visual impairments since adaptive physical education teachers make adaptations based on individual characteristics, whether associated with a variety of co-occurring disabilities or with varying levels of vision(Lieberman, 2011). All children should learn the same units, with modifications when necessary, typically receiving an equal amount of instruction per week as their sighted peers, or more. Skilled peer tutors and paraeducators can be a resource to assist with games, fitness, or other activities when needed (Rusotti & Shaw, 2004; Wiskochil, Lieberman, Houston-Wilson, & Petersen, 2007). When students with visual impairments are included in general physical education with peers, the entire class should learn sports for people who are visually impaired such as goal ball, beep baseball, 5-a-side soccer, tandem biking, or running with no sight. Such action provides disability awareness and gives sighted peers knowledge of specialized sports for students who are blind or visually impaired (Foley, Tindall, Lieberman, & Kim, 2007).

**Position**

Without physical education, students with visual impairments may not develop gross and fine motor skills, including locomotor skills, necessary for fitness, wellness, and independent living (Houwen, Hartman, & Visscher, 2009). Students with visual impairments must not be denied the opportunity to participate in physical education due to stereotypical barriers or fear of liability. Indeed, lack of visual motivation to move, challenges in visually imitating the movements of others, and the potential over protectiveness of adults may make physical education even more important for students with visual impairments than for their sighed peers.

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