

ADAPTED SWIMMING GUIDELINES

ABOUT ATHLETICS FOR ALL

History

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) of the U.S. Department of Education issued a Dear Colleague Letter on January 25, 2013 clarifying elementary, secondary, and postsecondary level schools' responsibilities under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehab Act) to provide extracurricular athletic opportunities for students with disabilities. The guidance clarifies when and how schools should include students with disabilities in mainstream interscholastic athletic programs, defines what true equal treatment of student athletes with disabilities means, and urges schools to create adapted interscholastic athletic programs for students with disabilities.

The OCR Dear Colleague Letter helps clarify the existing regulations and statute under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehab Act) to provide interscholastic, club, and intramural athletics for students with disabilities. The Rehab Act protects the rights of students with disabilities from discrimination in educational programs and activities in colleges and universities. The Rehab Act requires that students with disabilities be provided equal opportunity for participation in interscholastic, club, and intramural athletic programs offered by a school.

What the Athletics for All Task Force Offers

Introductory sport guidelines and best practices for adapted sports considered easy to adapt to mainstream interscholastic sports

Facilitation of training for your coaches and officials with adaptive sports experts

Access to hundreds of community based adaptive sports organizations, resources and tools for specific sports

Decades of experience in disability sport training, sport adaptations and adaptive equipment

Sports Are Important for Students with Disabilities

Benefits for students with disabilities who participate in sports are similar to students without disabilities:

- More likely to have better grades, school attendance and lower dropout rate
- Build discipline, self-esteem, confidence, and independence
- Learn team work, skill development and goal setting
- Promote healthy lifestyle
- Can be a predictor of later successes in college, career and community

- Students with disabilities do not receive the same amount of physical activity and athletic opportunities as students without disabilities
- According to the CDC, youth with disabilities are twice as likely to be physically inactive, resulting in obesity rates almost 40% higher than in youth without disabilities creating much higher risks for health-related diseases

Due to the resources available, it is possible to add adapted sports within school athletic programs without creating an undue administrative burden for State High School Associations or requiring the association to change existing rules for the athletes without disabilities.

OVERVIEW

USA SWIMMING GUIDELINES FOR SWIMMERS WITH DISABILITIES IN MEETS

The USA Swimming Rules & Regulations allow the referee to modify the rules for swimmers with disabilities in meets. Competition rules for athletes with disabilities would be the same as those for all athletes unless the athlete's impairment doesn't allow the athlete to complete the stroke correctly.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Swimmer: Notifying the referee prior to competition of any disability and of the requested modification

Swimmer: The swimmer or coach will provide any assistants or equipment (tappers, deck mats, etc.) if required

Referee: Determines if the requested modifications are appropriate and can be met

Referee: Instructing the starter and turn officials as to the accommodations to be made for the swimmer with a disability

The content under adapted swimming rules, modifications, coaching, communication, and accommodations for these guidelines are from USA Swimming sanctioned programs and meets and programs can utilize this information and expand on it based on their own programs needs.

ADAPTED SWIMMING RULES

Competition rules for athletes with disabilities would be the same as those for all athletes unless the athlete's impairment doesn't allow the athlete to complete the stroke correctly.

Examples:

1. Athletes without function in the hips or legs might not be able to complete a breaststroke kick. In those cases they must drag their legs. Athletes with cerebral palsy who may not have the coordination to complete the kick must show intent to kick or drag their legs (a scissor kick would be okay in this instance).

2. Athletes without one or both hands are unable to do a two hand touch in butterfly or breaststroke.
3. Athletes with one upper limb shorter than the other will not be able to touch with both hands in butterfly, but they should still bring their arms together simultaneously.
4. Athletes may start from the water, the wall or the blocks, but should be given time to get into starting position prior to race; a coach may help the athlete get into starting position.
5. Competition suits must be regular racing suits, but may be modified for fit based on disability. A floating or “wetsuit” is never legal in competition.
6. Paddles, fins, braces or tape are not allowed in competition.

MODIFICATIONS FOR ATHLETES WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

Start: With an audible starting system, no modification is usually required for a swimmer who is blind or has vision loss. A swimmer may require assistance getting to and on the block.

Start: Should the swimmer feel insecure starting from the block or deck, an in the water start is allowed.

Lane Lines/Markers: Bright colored lane lines or markers on the lane lines may be of assistance

Lane Lines/Markers: Swimmers will run into lane lines a lot while learning. Sharp/rough lane lines may be painful and cause the swimmer frustration.

Walls/Turns: A bright colored marker may be placed on or near the wall for beginning teaching purposes to locate the wall. As they develop, the swimmer should work on their stroke count.

Walls/Turns: A swimmer who is blind or has vision loss is permitted to have personal assistant (“tappers” who use poles with soft tipped ends to tap the swimmer as notification of turns and the finish).

Walls/Turns: Sound devices shall not be used. It is the swimmer’s responsibility to provide the tapper(s) who will be positioned within the confines of the swimmer’s lane at the ends of the pool.

MODIFICATIONS FOR ATHLETES WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENTS

- Swimmers with hearing impairments require a visual starting signal (strobe light or starter’s arm signals)
- The referee may reassign lanes within the swimmer’s heat by exchanging one lane for the other so that the strobe light or starter’s arm signals can more readily be seen (see figures A & B for examples of signals)
- A false start rope is required in the event of a recall, provided the meet host is notified by the entry deadline that an athlete with a hearing impairment will be participating

- The starter shall advise the swimmers about the location of the strobe light and the light will be located where the swimmers can clearly see it for the start
- For backstroke starts the light should be positioned so that the swimmers do not have to turn their heads to look backwards

FIGURE A: Forward Start

1. Twist hand at chin level and short whistles
2. Arm overhead: swimmer steps onto starting blocks
3. Arm moves to shoulder level: signal to “take your mark”
4. Arm moves to side of body: starting signal

FIGURE B: Backstroke Start

1. Twist hand at chin level: short whistles
2. Arm overhead: swimmer enters water; drop arm to side while swimmer enters water
3. Arm overhead: swimmer returns to backstroke start position
4. Arm moves to shoulder level: signal to “take your mark”
5. Arm moves to side of body: starting signal

MODIFICATIONS FOR ATHLETES WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

Starting:

- May take longer to assume their starting position
- May have difficulty holding the starting platform or pool end for a start
- May need assistance from someone on the deck to maintain a starting position
- May use a modified starting position on the blocks, deck, or in the water
- Shall use a forward start for freestyle, breaststroke, and butterfly. The referee may allow the following modifications:
 - the swimmer may start from a sitting position on the block or on the deck
 - the swimmer may assume a starting position in the water, with or without assistance
 - if the swimmer cannot use a hand and/or foot to maintain contact with the wall, some other part of the body may be used

- for breaststroke and butterfly, after the start and after each turn, a swimmer who is unable to push off with the leg(s) may perform one arm stroke that need not be simultaneous or on the horizontal plane to attain the breast position

Stroke/Kick: in judging the stroke or kick of a swimmer with a physical disability, the referee and stroke & turn judge should follow the general rule that if a part of the body is absent or cannot be used, it is not judged; if it is used during the stroke or kick, it should be judged in accordance with the USA Swimming Rules and Regulations. Judgements should be made based on the actual rule, not on the swimmer's technique. For example, the breaststroke swimmer with one arm or leg shorter than the other, may have a non-symmetrical stroke or kick, but as long as the arm or leg action is simultaneous, it would meet that portion of the rule. No flotation devices should be permitted.

Turn/Finishes: Touches shall be judged in the same manner as strokes and kicks, on the basis of the arm(s) and/or hand(s) that the swimmer can use. In breaststroke and butterfly events, the competitor must reach forward as if attempting a simultaneous two hand touch. When a swimmer has a different arm length, only the longer arm must touch the wall, but both arms must be stretched forward simultaneously. Swimmers with no arms or with upper limbs too short to stretch above the head may touch the wall with any part of the upper body.

Relays: relay swimmers who cannot exit the water immediately may be allowed to remain in the lane until all relays have finished so long as they do not interfere with the other swimming or the timing equipment

COACHING

Practice Accommodations

1. Use equipment such as fins or paddles to help the athlete make intervals (different types of fins to accommodate the athletes impairments, see page XX).
2. Have the swimmers without disabilities attempt to swim like the athletes with disabilities to get a better understanding.
3. Modify the distance the athlete with a disability swims, but keep the same interval as the team.
4. Spend an extra 10 to 15 minutes before or after practice developing ideal technique or to just try new things for the athlete with a disability.
5. Challenge the athlete like you would the rest of the team, and make adjustments for the athlete's impairment.
6. Make the athlete as independent as possible.

Get to know all swimmers on the team

- Learn about the swimmer's reasons for swimming

- Observe the swimmer's technical skills, fitness levels, communication skills, and maturity level
- When appropriate, learn about the swimmer's disability and ask the swimmer or parents to teach you
- Use simulations to help coaches and swimmers develop a better understanding of disabilities.

Disability; Stimulation

Vision Impairment: Place waxed paper inside swim goggles

Hearing Impairment: Wear ear plugs

Loss of leg function: Hold a swim fin between the legs above the ankles or increase difficulty by wearing long pants

Loss of arm function: Hold a swim fin between the upper arm and chest

Have the same expectations

- Include the swimmer with a disability in all instruction and activities, making modifications as needed
- Expect the swimmer with a disability to comply with all the expectations regarding team policies and meet participation
- Challenge the swimmer with a disability to perform in practices and meets just as you challenge swimmers without disabilities

Use the same principles of stroke technique and training

- Use experimentation and coaching expertise to determine:
 - best head/body positions
 - effective propulsion techniques
 - ways to decrease resistance
- Use the same principles of training for swimmers with disabilities as you do for athletes without disabilities (i.e. improving fitness, energy systems, etc.)
- Pay attention to every swimmer
- Provide coaching to every swimmer
- Make efforts to ensure the safety of every swimmer

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Facilitate understanding, friendships, and sportsmanship

- Set an example of acceptance and understanding
- Team meetings should include topics such as acceptance, respect, responsibility, and sportsmanship

Use a variety of communication methods

- Verbal communication refers to speaking and sign language
- Non-verbal communication includes gestures, demonstrations, signage/white boards, etc.
- Talk, listen, and observe
- Check that athletes understand
- When appropriate, ask teammates to help each other understand and follow coaching instructions

Disability: Communication Cues

Physical Disabilities: Move/knee so that you are at the swimmers' eye level, especially when speaking with an athlete who uses a wheelchair or athletes with short stature

Vision Impairments: Use rich verbal descriptions

Vision Impairments: Physically assist swimmers to achieve correct technique

Hearing Impairments: Face the swimmer

Hearing Impairments: Use normal voice

Hearing Impairments: Use gestures or signs

Hearing Impairments: Use written instructions

Sharing team information with families

- Be aware of communication preferences of swimmers and their families
- Use multiple methods of communication when disseminating information such as team policies, practice schedules, and meet announcements
 - written handouts
 - club website
 - social networking websites
 - telephone trees

Develop consistency across coaching staff

- Communicate regularly amongst coaching staff, athletes can get frustrated when their coaches are not on the same page

ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodations for athletes with disabilities

- The term reasonable accommodations means practical, effective, common-sense ways to help swimmers with disabilities
- Collaborate with the swimmer with the disability and family to identify and provide appropriate, no/low cost, low hassle accommodations that work
- An accommodation could be a personal assistant who helps at meets or practices by:
 - helping swimmers enter or exit the pool
 - assisting swimmers with cognitive disabilities to understand meet routines or coaches instruction
 - tapping blind swimmers prior to turns and finishes
 - using alternative methods of communication for swimmers with hearing impairments
 - helping swimmers with behavioral disorders to cope with challenging situations

****note: USA Swimming rules specify that personal assistants may not coach unless they are coach members***

Discuss conduct of swimming events with the meet referee

- Swimmers with disabilities competing in time-appropriate events such as swimming the 50/100 during a 200 event or the 500/1000 during a 1650
- Special seeding arrangements
 - a swimmer with a hearing impairment may see the starter and strobe light better from certain lanes
 - an outside lane may be more efficient for a swimmer with a disability to enter/exit the pool
 - personal assistants who help with meet routines, tapping, interpreting, water entry/exit
 - visual starting signals or alternate strobe light placement for swimmers with hearing impairments

COMPETITION MODELS

Every state is different in its decision to offer specific events. The majority allow athletes to compete in any event offered. Vision loss could be included within any event as long as there is the ability to “tap” the athlete when they are close to the turn or finish end of the pool. The following are examples of some of the state high school associations offering adapted swimming for students with physical disabilities.

State: Best Practices

Illinois: Illinois allows an athlete with a disability to compete in the 50, 100, and 200 freestyle and the 100 yard breaststroke

Michigan: Schools need to accommodate individuals with disabilities to the extent that reasonable accommodations can be made that won't alter the essential elements of the sport, increase the injury to the other participants or themselves and/or provide the student athlete with an unfair advantage

Missouri: If the athlete needs to use equipment or specific accommodations they must request this to the principal in advance

Athletes Must:

- Have a permanent disability
- A record on file with the school
- Have a verification of the disability
- Demonstrate that they are water safe

EQUAL ACCESS/PARTICIPATION MODEL

- Athletes compete at dual, group, and at the state level, but do not deliver points to their team to win a meet
- Athletes invited to the state meet based on a timed final or field event performances
- Athletes do not achieve points but do receive medals and can set state records

SCORING MODEL

- Athletes achieve swimming high school letters through scoring points
- Athlete can score points for the team
- Athlete can score points at state, receive medals and set state records
- Points given based on the total number of participants

- The one plus one—a single athlete with a disability would receive a point (or the number determined by the state) and a medal

- Scoring would be based on the system used by the state in the traditional model if full heats exist

ADVANCEMENT TO THE STATE CHAMPIONSHIP

1. Ranking list: top eight athletes invited to the state meet

2. Eligible athletes apply to be part of the team and selection is based on past performance

3. Meet a qualifying standard during the course of the season. Standards could be based on using the athletes without a disability qualifying time compared to the percentage of the FINA World Rankings and then use the same percentage to compare to the IPC World Rankings to derive a Paralympic eligible qualifying time

DETERMINATION OF TEAM CHAMPIONSHIPS

1. A team trophy given to traditional teams and one for the combined scores of the disabled athletes and the traditional athletes from the same school.

2. If the points scored by an athlete with a disability enables his/her team to tie or exceed the highest team point total of another team(s) then the team with an athlete with a disability will be declared a co-champion and the other team(s) without the athlete with a disability will be declared the outright champion. This applies to the runner-up position as well as the regular season, district, regional, and state meet.

3. Traditional system of awarding team trophies based on the combination of traditional and athlete with a disability.

BEST PRACTICES

- Wear school uniform

- Meet high school eligibility requirements (may be modification on age due to previous surgeries or illness)

- Designate a set number of competitions that an athlete with a disability must compete in to be eligible to advance to state competitions

EQUIPMENT

- Figure A shows a coach using a “tapper” to let the athlete with a visual impairment know when to make the turn.
- Figure B shows a sprinkler system for athlete’s with visual impairments to be able to turn without tapping assistance from the coach
- Figures 1-3 show different types of fins or paddles to accommodate the athlete’s impairment.

GROUPINGS

The groupings presented here are suggested ways to create competition classes for athletes with disabilities. In order to not be confused with the national and international classification systems, we use the term groupings for school-based sport.

Sitting: Athletes with mobility impairments who participate sitting down (examples: athletes with spinal cord injuries, above knee amputations, spina bifida, etc)

Standing: Athletes with mobility impairments who participate standing up (athletes with arm amputations, single leg below knee amputation, or impairments that impact balance)

Visually Impaired (VI): Athletes with visual impairments or blindness

Role of Athletes Without Disabilities

Programs may wish to consider a policy whereby athletes without disabilities may enter the adapted program temporarily while rehabilitating from an injury, so long as the injury present in such a way that the athlete might otherwise otherwise qualify someone with a permanent disability experiences the same physical limitations. For example, any injury or surgery where the physician has recommended the athlete stay off the limb for a period of time and where that time spans a full season of an adapted sport, the athlete might qualify to participate in adapted sports regularly.

How will a state determine who is eligible? There are several different models to determine eligibility and minimal disability criteria. When possible and appropriate, it is best to stay within the three categories: sit down, stand up, and visually impaired.

Athletes with a disability have impairment (s) that may lead to competitive disadvantage in sport. Classification is the process by which athletes are assessed relative to the impact of impairment on their ability to compete in a specific sport.

Within the classification system, criteria are put in place to ensure that winning is determined by skill, fitness, power, endurance, tactical ability and mental focus, the same factors that account for success in sport for athletes without a disability.

Classification is sport specific. Each sport has established groups, call sport classes, to group athletes for competition based on activity limitation for that sport.

The international classification system for individual sports can be viewed online at: Paralympic.org/classification. Most IPC classification systems are not appropriate (too detailed) for a high school setting. It is suggested to modify to simplified / grouped classes such as sitting (wheelchair athletes), visually impaired, and ambulatory.

Disabilities

At the interscholastic level, these disabilities can be served in swimming:

- Achondroplasia
- Amputee
- Arthrogryposis
- Avascular Necrosis
- Birth Defect
- Brachial Plexus Palsy
- Caudal Regression
- Cerebellar Disgenesis
- Cerebral Palsy
- Congenital Hypotonia
- Congenital Limb Loss
- Diplegia
- Dystonia
- Dwarfism
- Dysmelia
- Erb's Palsy
- Femoral Focal Deficiency
- Femoral Hypoplasia
- FMD
- Full Joint Ankylosis or Replacement
- Guillain-Barre Syndrome
- Hearing Impaired
- Hip Dysplasia
- Larsen's Syndrome
- Leigh's Disease

- Lower Limb Paralysis
- McCunne Albright Syndrome
- Mitochondrial Disease
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Muscular Dystrophy
- Osteogenesis Imperfecta
- Parkinson's
- PFFD (Proximal)
- Post-polio
- Progressive Neurological Disorder
- Pseudo Achondroplasia
- Sacral Agenesis
- Severe Amblyopia
- Severe Scoliosis
- Spastic Diplegia
- Spastic Paralysis
- Spina Bifida
- Spinal Cord Injury
- Spinal Muscular Atrophy
- Stroke
- Transverse Myelitis
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Vertigo/Balance Issues
- Visual Motor Integration Impairment
- Visually Impaired

- Type 1 Diabetes

- Any other medical doctor diagnosed permanent lower body disability that prevents a player from competing in mainstream sports

SAFETY

Student athletes with disabilities do not represent a higher level of liability risk or risk management concern than student athletes without disabilities. With proper planning and contingencies, student athletes with disabilities can seamlessly integrate into the dynamics of an interscholastic team. Individualized assessments can help assess or identify any potential safety concerns.

Ensuring athlete safety is a priority. Through education, resources, and training, members of the sport community can recognize, reduce, and respond to misconduct in sport. Please refer to the following resources for more information.

What is SafeSport?: <http://safesport.org/what-is-safesport/>

Coaches Toolkit: <http://safesport.org/toolkit/coaches/>

SafeSport Trainings: <http://safesport.org/take-the-training/>

RESOURCES

USA SWIMMING: <http://www.usaswimming.org/disability>

USA-S RULE BOOK: Article 105

ASA: The Home of Aquatic Sports in England: <http://www.swimming.org/asa/our-sports/disability-swimming/>

CLUB FINDER: <http://usaswimming.org/DesktopDefault.aspx?TabId=2078>

U.S. Paralympics Swimming Officials Course—Introduction: <http://training.teamusa.org/store/details/7>

MISSION

The mission of the Athletics for All Task Force is to inform and provide the tools and guidelines by which coaches, athletic directors and school administrators can include students with physical disabilities in interscholastic sports.

VISION

It is the vision of the Athletics for All Task Force that students with disabilities will have access to athletic opportunities throughout the United States in an equal manner as students without disabilities. The Task Force envisions an educational system that provides equal opportunities for student-athletes to derive the physical, mental, and emotional benefits of interscholastic sports, enabling each to develop into healthy, well-adjusted, contributing members of their respective communities.

ATHLETICS FOR ALL TASK FORCE

Active Policy Solutions

<http://www.activepolicysolutions.com/>

American Association of Adapted Sports Programs (AASP)

<http://www.adaptedsports.org/>

Bay Area Outreach and Recreation Program (BORP)

<http://www.borp.org/>

BlazeSports America

<http://www.blazesports.org/>

Bridge II Sports

<http://www.bridge2sports.org/>

Competitive Edge Management

Disabled Sports USA (DSUSA)

<http://www.disabledsportsusa.org>

Great Lakes Adapted Sports Association (GLASA)

<http://glasa.org/>

Lakeshore Foundation

<http://www.lakeshore.org/>

Louisiana Games Uniting Mind and Body (GUMBO)

<https://sites.google.com/site/louisianagumboinc/home>

National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability (NCHPAD)

<http://www.nchpad.org/>

Special Olympics

<http://www.specialolympics.org/>

United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA)

<http://www.usaba.org/>

Wheelchair & Ambulatory Sports USA (WASUSA)

<http://wasusa.org/>