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National Parent Technical Assistance Center

Information for families and Parent Centers

Your Child with a Disability Can Take Part in Extracurricular Activities



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Extracurricular Activities Are Important

Schools do more than teach students to read and do math. Students also eat lunch together, go on field trips, and join school sponsored clubs and sports teams. These are called “nonacademic” or “extracurricular” activities. These activities are important for all children, including those with disabilities.

Students with disabilities must have an equal chance to take part in sports, counseling, clubs, health services, student jobs, transportation, and other school activities. But how do you make sure your child has that chance?

Working With Your Child’s School

If your child has special education services at school, your child also has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. That team makes an education plan for your child. As the parent, you are part of this IEP team. The team should talk about how your child can take part in extracurricular activities. Share with the team what activities your child enjoys.

The IEP team must follow the federal law about special education. This law is called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It has guidelines for including students with disabilities in extracurricular activities. The IEP team decides how much a child can do in an activity so the plan is just right for your child.

Students with disabilities may need extra help so they can do an activity. They might need an interpreter, assistive technology, or an aide. These supports are called “accommodations” or “supplemental aids or services.” The team needs to write these services in the IEP.

Here is Sally’s story:

Sally is in ninth grade and is deaf. She likes to write and wants to work for the school paper. Sally and her parents share this with her IEP team. The team decides that working on the paper would help Sally. Sally needs an interpreter to talk with the other students. They write that accommodation in the IEP to help Sally be a part of the newspaper staff.

Some students with disabilities have a 504 Plan, not an IEP. If your child has a 504 Plan, you can ask that supports be included in the plan for nonacademic and extracurricular activities. The U. S. Department of Education recently published a document for schools about their responsibility to provide students with disabilities the opportunity to participate in extracurricular athletics. Here is one example:

Alex is in fourth grade and wants to participate in his school’s gymnastics club after school. He has diabetes and a 504 Plan. Alex needs help testing his blood sugar and giving himself insulin shots. The school must provide this help during the after-school sports program so he can be in the gymnastics club like other students in his grade.

Your Child Can Be Included!

The law says that all children with disabilities should have the same chance as other students to take part in school sponsored nonacademic and extracurricular activities. With the right help, your child can be included like other students!

Additional Resources:

U.S. Department of Education’s 2013 *Dear Colleague Letter* on extracurricular athletics and students with disabilities: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201301-504.html>

U.S. Department of Education’s 2011 Guidance Document: *Creating Equal Opportunities for Children and Youth with Disabilities to Participate in Physical Education and Extracurricular Athletics*: <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/equal-pe.pdf>

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