IDEA The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was enacted “to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.” (IDEA §300.1)

APE (IDEA §300.39 a 1 ii) Adapted physical education or specially designed instruction in physical education is a direct instructional service which individualizes the physical education curriculum according to a student’s unique needs. It is the only direct, instructional service specified in IDEA legislation. “(1) Special education means specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including—(i) Instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions and in other settings; and (ii) Instruction in physical education.

SBPT (IDEA §300.32) Physical therapy, as a related service, is provided “to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education.” Since physical therapy services are delivered in a variety of settings (hospitals, clinics, home, school, etc.), questions often arise as to the role physical therapists (PTs) play in the school setting. In public schools, physical therapists assist students to access school environments, participate throughout the school day & benefit from their educational program.

This fact sheet aims to clarify the roles of adapted physical education and physical therapy services for educational benefit under IDEA. Similarities and differences between these disciplines are discussed to serve as a guide for school administrators, teachers of general and special education, related service providers, students, parents and guardians. Please note that these are general guidelines; readers should familiarize themselves with the policies of each state or local education agency (LEA), as requirements and regulations may vary.  

APE and SBPT:

- There is confusion with administrators, students, parents/families, general & special education instructional staff and related service providers due to overlapping areas of practice & expertise
- Related services (PT) support special education (APE)
- PT & APE provide different perspectives on similar areas of student development
- APE & PT is not interchangeable, APE cannot supplant SBPT or vice versa
- Sometimes improvements in motor development cannot be attained by a physical educator using the usual time allotments, methods or activities associated with PE
- Sometimes fitness or endurance improvements cannot be attained by a physical therapy related service using the customary service delivery, dosing and interventions
Similarities and Differences Between School-based Physical Therapy and Adapted Physical Education Services

**Purpose:**
- **SBPTs:** Diagnose & manage movement dysfunction. PTs work to restore, maintain & promote physical function, wellness and fitness. PT interventions prevent the onset, symptoms, and progression of impairments, functional limitations & disabilities resulting from diseases, disorders, conditions, or injuries.
- **APES:** Work to improve student participation & motor development. Address fitness & promote healthy behaviors.

**Work:**
- **SBPTs:** School Based Physical Therapist’s are licensed, medical professionals who use therapeutic techniques & intervention to correct, facilitate, or adapt the student’s movement & motoric performance, promoting participation and access throughout the educational setting.
- **APES:** Both APE and SBPT:
  - Help students increase activity and participation
  - Work collaboratively with teams, set goals, & monitor progress with regular reporting
  - Adhere to state policies, licensure laws & professional standards
  - Educate and empower students, teams, & families with community activity suggestions, health promotion & wellness
  - Provide services based on student needs, not administrative convenience.

Both APE and SBPT:
- Help students increase activity and participation
- Work collaboratively with teams, set goals, & monitor progress with regular reporting
- Adhere to state policies, licensure laws & professional standards
- Educate and empower students, teams, & families with community activity suggestions, health promotion & wellness
- Provide services based on student needs, not administrative convenience.
Similarities and Differences Between School-based Physical Therapy and Adapted Physical Education Services

Areas Addressed:

APE Specialists

- Environmental Adaptations/Accessibility
- Access (to campus, programs & activities)
- Body Function (e.g. pain, cardiovascular capacity, efficiency)

Both APE and SBPT:

- Participation
- Safety
- Object Control Skills
- Functional Skills
- Play
- Sport & Game Skills
- Use of Equipment & Assistive Technology
- Leisure/Recreation Activities
- Motor Development, Skills & Coordination
- Fitness (e.g. strength, endurance)
- Sensorimotor Coordination

SBPTs

- Pre-vocational/Work Hardening
- Postural Balance and Stability
- Functional Mobility/Transfer
- Motor Planning
- Selection & Management of Equipment/Assistive Technology

Qualifications, Roles, & Responsibilities

SBPTs

- Therapist in education
- Related service
- Successfully completed national examination
- Certified by Board (state)
- Licensed by the state
- Services can be reimbursed by Medicaid

Both APE and SBPT:

- Itinerant
- Roles are not universally understood
- Experts in gross motor development & movement
- Possible specialty certification (CAPE for APE; PCS for SBPT)
- Varied professional degrees (BS, MS, DPT, PhD)
- Supervision usually from outside discipline
- High requirement for collaboration
- Provide continuum of services/Least restrictive environment implementation
- APE services may be provided by General Education PE teacher (varies by state)

APE Specialists

- Educator
- Direct, educational service
- Licensed in physical education by State Educational Agency
- APE services

APE Specialists

- PE Curriculum
- Student Engagement
- Social Skills
- Specific Motor Patterns
- Sensorimotor Integration
- Aquatic Skills
- Dance Skills
- Skills for individual & group games (including intramural & lifetime sports)
Collaboration between
APE & SBPT²,³,⁶,⁷

Appropriate
- Both collaborate on integrated student goal(s)
- SBPT provided within PE or APE class routines
- Both collaborate on Individual Transition Plan, especially identifying and developing community options for life-long fitness, recreation, & leisure
- Both collaborate to solving difficult, challenging, & complex issues with participation, engagement, & physical activity.
- Both collaborate on special projects, programs, or initiatives

Inappropriate
- SBPT provides APE assessment to IEP team
- SBPT provides APE recommendations to IEP team
- SBPT develops student goal(s) addressing PE curriculum
- SBPT provides APE services

Appropriate if NO APE specialist or APE provided by PE teacher
- SBPT collaborates with PE teacher on APE assessment for IEP team
- SBPT collaborates with PE teacher to provide APE recommendations to IEP team
- PE teacher consults, as needed with SBPT or other IEP team members to develop student goal(s) addressing PE curriculum
- PE teacher consults, as needed with SBPT or other IEP team members, to provide APE services

Take Home Messages:
- While the areas addressed by adapted physical education and school-based physical therapy overlap, they are distinctly different disciplines.
- SBPTs, unless they possess a valid/related teaching credential, should not provide physical education (Adapted or General) evaluation or instruction.

References:
4. Iowa Department of Education. Educational and Medical-Based Physical Therapy Comparison: 3 to 21 Years Old. 2010.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>What is the focus of the service?</strong></th>
<th>SBPT</th>
<th>APE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work to achieve student goals developed by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team</td>
<td>Ensure student progress through and participation in the physical education curriculum</td>
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<td>Promote access to academic curriculum, campus/school environment, programs and participation in all school activities</td>
<td>Individualize instruction for physical education</td>
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<td>Address post-secondary transition goals</td>
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<th><strong>Who is eligible?</strong></th>
<th>SBPT</th>
<th>APE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Any student who meets the criteria for 1 or more of the disability classifications identified by IDEA (or under additional classification criteria defined by state) who requires the expertise of a PT to benefit from his/her IEP</td>
<td>Any student who meets the criteria for 1 or more of the disability classifications identified by IDEA (or under additional classification criteria defined by state) who requires specially designed instruction to safely participate in her/his physical education and progress through the state established curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>What is the evaluation procedure?</strong></th>
<th>SBPT</th>
<th>APE</th>
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<td>PT evaluation includes observation in the school environment and use of appropriate tests and measures to obtain appropriate and authentic student performance data to analyze student function throughout the school day</td>
<td>APE evaluation includes observation in General Education PE and uses standardized and/or informal tests and measures to obtain appropriate and authentic student performance data for analysis in regard to physical</td>
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<td>IEP team utilizes the SBPT’s and APE Specialist’s respective reports and recommendations together with reports gathered by other team members to make decisions</td>
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<th><strong>Who provides the service?</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>A licensed physical therapist or physical therapist assistant</td>
<td>An educator licensed in physical education (at the appropriate grade level) or an APE specialist/CAPE certified</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Who decides need &amp; service delivery?</strong></th>
<th>SBPT</th>
<th>APE</th>
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<tr>
<td>IEP team decides by consensus, with consideration to the SBPT’s or APE specialist’s recommendation. IEP team prioritizes to create discipline-free IEP goals</td>
<td>IEP team decides if student is eligible for APE/Specially Designed Instruction in PE</td>
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<td>IEP team decides which related services are necessary to achieve goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBPT&lt;sup&gt;5,8&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>APE&lt;sup&gt;2,6&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Where are services provided?</strong></td>
<td><strong>How are services delivered?</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>In least restrictive environment in the school where student is expected to perform the task (e.g., classrooms, hallways, stairs, lunchroom, bathroom, playground, worksites, buses, community, or other instructional settings)</td>
<td>In the least restrictive environment, usually the gym or playing field</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Every effort is made for student to receive PE with peers.; however, services are provided on a continuum to meet</td>
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<td><strong>How are services delivered?</strong></td>
<td><strong>How are services documented?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Integration of physical therapy into the student’s actual classroom or school activities</td>
<td>Related to student’s progress towards his/her IEP goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consultation and collaboration with school staff and parent/guardian</td>
<td>Written in language understandable to parents and other educational team members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Direct intervention in groups or individually, when necessary</td>
<td>In compliance with federal, state, and local education agency guidelines</td>
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