ADAPTING PHYSICAL EDUCATION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

*It is recommended that the individual sections of the information below are embedded in monthly emails to P.E. teachers over the first quarter (and repeated as necessary) so as not to overwhelm them with a one-time, two-page list of ideas in an effort to increase the chance the information is read and implemented.

HELPFUL PREPARATION STRATEGIES:

- Ask the student’s Vision Teacher or Orientation and Mobility Specialist about his/her degree of visual impairment and the amount of residual vision available to the student.
- Ask students what they are able to see and which objects and conditions present problems and at what distance the object is visible.
- Allow students to position themselves where they are able to see the best.
- Make sure indoor areas are well lit (check with student/vision teacher - dim light may be preferred)
- Use light colored equipment, preferably white, yellow, or orange, unless dark is needed to provide greater contrast. Consider the background color against which the object will be used.
- Modify activities and equipment where necessary (see ideas below). Use audible bells, guide ropes for running, larger equipment and, where applicable, a buddy system. Talk with your Orientation and Mobility Specialist about providing specialized equipment.
- Stand near the visually impaired student so that instructions can be seen and heard.
- Provide arm support, if needed, on jumping activities.
- Use touch to demonstrate body movements as appropriate.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS/ BEST PRACTICES:

- Use the student’s name before giving instructions.
- Use descriptive verbal instruction. Say what it is you are actually doing in body oriented language. (For example: When teaching to hop, say "Stand on your left foot, raise your right foot, and jump in the air on your left foot.")
- Use directional words and landmarks in the playing area to direct a low vision student. (Example "Walk to the door, turn toward the window using a quarter or 90 degree turn.")
- Vision plays an important part in maintaining balance. A lack of vision often affects movement and coordination of a visually impaired student. Additional intervention and practice is often required.
- Use additional helpers or a buddy system if needed; however, encourage the student to work as independently as possible so they do not become over-reliant on assistance.
- Break skills into small steps.
- Standard equipment can be adapted to meet the needs of visually impaired students. If you need ideas or assistance, consult with the student’s Orientation and Mobility Specialist.
GENERAL GUIDELINES:

☐ Go from less difficult to more difficult skills and breakdown skills into their component parts. (Example: Catching a ball: Bounce the student the ball a short distance away. Gradually increase the distance. Then eliminate the bounce at a shorter distance before increasing the distance again.)
☐ Limit playing space--this allows for greater involvement for the visually impaired student without greatly changing the experience for the sighted participants.
☐ Slow the action - use a balloon, waffle ball, “slow-motion” ball or scarf instead of a regular ball.
☐ Use larger playing objects, which can be seen better by the student. Also, targets can moved closer, made larger or sound-added for localizing.
☐ Use proper lighting and color contrast. A ball can be taped with bright colored tape to contrast with the floor and walls. Contrasting-colored tape can be used to mark the playing areas on the floor or walls.
☐ Keep in mind that bright sunlight or dark days may alter the student’s visual functioning. When working outside, realize that many visually impaired students need longer periods for their eyes to adjust to the change in lighting moving between indoors and outside. Especially be cautious if stairs are present near and entrance/exit as the student’s vision may not be able to adapt quickly enough to remain safe.
☐ Try to keep verbal contact with the visually impaired/blind student and ensure safety rules are known and followed by all students.
☐ Alert the visually impaired student to the location of any applicable obstacle--such as goal-posts--in open areas, on floor, and at head height.

SPECIFIC ADAPTATIONS:

☐ Tag games: use bells or sound device on the person who is "It" to allow the visually impaired student the opportunity to locate him/her.
☐ Boundaries: Change the floors texture. Example: Use of a rug or rubber polydot on the floor to mark space where exercises are done. Place a rubber carpet runner next to the wall so that child knows when he/she steps onto the changed surface that he/she has stepped out of bounds. The change in surface also signals a warning to the student that a wall or object is coming up so he/she knows to slow down and stop.
☐ Throwing and catching: Give the receiver a sound clue. Bounce the ball instead of throwing it directly. Use different types of balls, such as nerf or fluff to lessen the impact when hit with the ball. Balloons also slow down the action. When throwing at a target, provide a sound behind the target (e.g.; clapping, beeper.)
☐ Striking and Hitting: Use ball on a tee, a large whiffle ball and an oversized bat. Ball can be rolled on a table or the floor. Bells can be put inside the ball to be heard when rolled.
☐ Running: Use a partner who assists by holding hands or uses “brush contact” (keep touching hand forearm, wrist or any part of the arm), or a loop of a flexible piece of material can be held by both the guide runner and the visually impaired student. Run to caller's voice for a short run. Student can run by self-holding onto a rope stretched between two points. Put tape on the rope at the end so the student can turn and return to the starting point in a shuttle run.

Adapted from Kathy Letcher, Overbrook School for the Blind