

# GUIDELINES - BEST PRACTICES for DISABILITY SWIMMING and DIVING

## Para Sport for High School Students

(Provided by U.S. Paralympic Swimming)

### WHY?

Students benefit from sports in a variety of ways and not just as a release of energy. It helps them prepare skills for the real world by introducing competition in a fun environment where they have time with their peers. It shows them that trying hard gives you a better chance of success. Research has shown that other benefits of being part of a team include increased health, higher self-esteem, and reduced incidence of risky behavior.

These same benefits are applicable to students with a disability who participate in sport. Swimming builds endurance, muscle strength and cardiovascular fitness. It is an activity that keeps your heart rate up but takes some of the stress that is common in impact sports off the body; injuries do not occur as easily. Swimmers who have disabilities endorse the sport because it gives them a sense of freedom. They do not have to rely on any supportive device, such as a wheelchair, to assist them. They are independent. They are only judged on their results and whether those results are improving.

The benefits to being part of a team are many. Other teammates will begin to understand overcoming adversity. They may first see the disability but after watching their teammates swim best times and put everything into a race, they will begin to just see ability. The competitive side of the athlete will take over, and disability or not, neither athlete will want to lose.

### WHO?

How will a state determine who is eligible? State associations may establish different eligibility criteria for athletes with disabilities who wish to participate in swimming. Below are some general criteria as determined by state associations:

### OPTIONS:

#### Michigan

Schools will conduct an individual assessment to accommodate individuals with disabilities to the extent reasonable accommodations can be made that won't alter the essential elements of the sport, increase 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 requires a specific accommodation, he/she must submit a request to the principal in advance of competition for individual assessment, and work with respective state association in consideration of request.

### **BEST PRACTICES:**

#### **The athletes must have:**

1. A permanent disability
2. Record on file with the school
3. Verification of the disability
4. Demonstrate that they are water-safe



The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) has a very detailed classification system, which is not feasible for a high school to use. We encourage high schools to look at general groupings such as spinal cord injuries resulting in paralysis, amputees, or Cerebral Palsy. Other disabilities may include vision loss and hearing impairment.

### WHAT EVENTS ARE OFFERED?

Each state may be different in its decision to offer specific events for student-athletes with disabilities. The majority may allow athletes to compete in any event offered. For example, vision loss could be included within any event as long as there is the ability to “tap” athletes when they are close to the turn or finish end of the pool (Illustration 1). Below are examples of a state that allows specific events for athletes with disabilities and states integrating athletes with disabilities into existing events.

#### OPTIONS:

1. Illinois allows student-athletes with disabilities to compete in the 50, 100 and 200-yard freestyle and the 100-yard breaststroke events.
2. States consider individualized accommodations and student-athletes with disabilities are integrated into the regular event program with other able-bodied high school athletes.

#### BEST PRACTICES:

1. The distances may be the same as current high school events, as they are equal to distances regularly competed in Paralympic sport, Deaflympics and other disability-specific competitions.
2. States may offer specific heats within events for student-athletes with disabilities. For example, all of the following impairment types are placed into a single heat: spinal cord injuries, moderate to severe Cerebral Palsy (CP) and amputees who are above elbow or knee or double limb amputees.
3. Student-athletes who have a less severe impairment (mild CP, below elbow or knee impairment, vision loss) could be included in heats with other able-bodied high school athletes and have the same expectations.

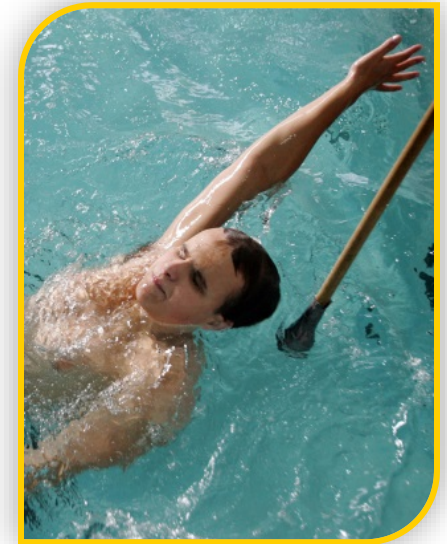
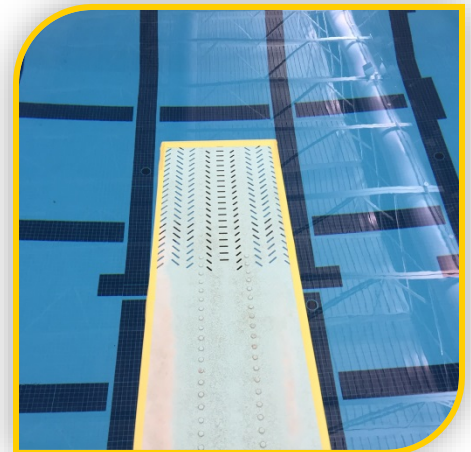


Illustration 1



### COMPETITION MODELS

Two basic models exist for competition within sports: participation and scoring. The scoring model below is an “equal access” model which also has a variety of options.

#### OPTIONS:

1. Participation Model:
  - a. Student-athletes with disabilities compete at dual, multi-team, and at the state level, but do not score team points that contribute to team score to win a meet.
  - b. Student-athletes with disabilities are invited to the state meet based on timed performances.
  - c. Student-athletes with disabilities do not achieve points but do receive medals and can set state records.
2. Scoring Model:
  - a. Student-athletes with disabilities achieve swimming high school letters through scoring points.
  - b. Student-athletes with disabilities can score points for the school team.
  - c. The team can score points from its student-athletes with disabilities during the regular season. Student-athletes with disabilities can score points at state, receive medals and set state records.

#### BEST PRACTICES:

1. Swimming does not currently have a specific model for scoring student-athletes with disabilities. Each state

association determines whether or not they are included with all of the athletes or scored separately. A scoring model is a fully integrated model based on most states not conducting separate events.

2. The student-athlete with a disability is a contributing member to the team. The scoring model may encourage coaches and schools to recruit athletes into their program.
3. There are many options in the scoring model for a state to choose from.

#### SCORING MODEL OPTIONS: EXAMPLES CURRENTLY USED IN TRACK

1. Based on athlete numbers:
  - a. Points awarded based on the total number of participants. (MN, LA, IA, ME)
  - b. The one plus one –
    1. A single student-athlete with a disability would receive a point (or the number determined by the state) and a medal.
    2. Two student-athletes with disabilities - one point and one medal
    3. Three student-athletes with disabilities - two athletes score points and are eligible to receive medals, etc.
  - c. Scoring would be based on the system used by the state in the traditional model if full heats exist.
2. Based on achieving a minimum standard:
  - a. Student-athletes with disabilities must achieve a minimum standard in the competition in order to earn a point. This is used to encourage a higher level of competition. A minimum standard could be derived from the U.S. Paralympics Swimming Can-Am Standards. See Appendix A.

#### ADVANCEMENT TO THE STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS OPTIONS:

1. Ranking list – top eight student-athletes with disabilities are invited to the state meet if they qualify through the state's traditional model.
2. Examples from USA Swimming:
  - a. For selection to a Zone team, student-athletes with disabilities apply to be a part of the team and selection is based on past performance.
  - b. Student-athletes meet a qualifying standard during the course of the season. Standards could be based on using the current (able-bodied) 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 student athlete with disabilities qualifying time. See <http://www.paralympic.org/swimming/rankings>. The following are the classes that could be used to create the standards. S is for freestyle, backstroke, butterfly events, SB is for breaststroke events, SM is for individual medley events. NOTE: This applies for Para-eligible impairments. This would not work for deaf, permanently physically disabled that are not Para-eligible, intellectually impaired, etc. athletes.
    1. Wheelchair athletes' times based on S5, SB4, SM5 sport classes
    2. Above elbow, above knee and multiple amputee/more impaired CP athletes' times based on S8/SB7/SM8 classifications



<http://www.paralympic.org/swimming/classification>

## DETERMINATION OF TEAM CHAMPIONSHIPS OPTIONS: EXAMPLES FROM TRACK AND FIELD

1. A team trophy is awarded to traditional teams and one for the combined scores of the student-athletes with disabilities and the able-bodied athletes from the same school. (WA)
2. If the points scored by a student-athlete(s) with a disability enables his/her team to tie or exceed the highest team point total of another team(s), then the team with a student-athlete(s) with a disability will be declared the co-champion and the other team(s) without the student-athlete(s) with the 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 (LA).
3. Traditional system of awarding team trophies based on the combination of able-bodied and student-athletes with disabilities points.
4. State championship points, trophy, medals are awarded for additional division with student-athletes with disabilities (example: Division I – small schools, Division II – large schools, Division III – student-athletes with disabilities).



Illustration 2

### BEST PRACTICES:

1. Student-athletes with disabilities would be required to wear a school uniform.
2. Student-athletes with disabilities would be required to meet high school eligibility requirements. It is possible the student may receive accommodation(s) or waivers based on respective high school association rules.
3. A state association could designate a set number of competitions that a student-athlete with a disability must compete in to be eligible to advance to state competitions.



Illustration 3

## COMPETITION RULES

Competition rules for student-athletes with disabilities would be the same as those for all athletes unless his/her impairment does not allow the athlete to complete the stroke correctly. Examples are below:

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 (provided that they show intent complies with the spirit of the rule – i.e. legs moving simultaneously in the same horizontal plane).
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 forward together simultaneously and show intent to touch at the turn/finish with both arms.
4. Athletes with disabilities 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 or team manager may help the athlete get into starting position.
5. Competition suits must be regular racing suits (FINA compliant), 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 except as authorized by the state association on an individual basis.

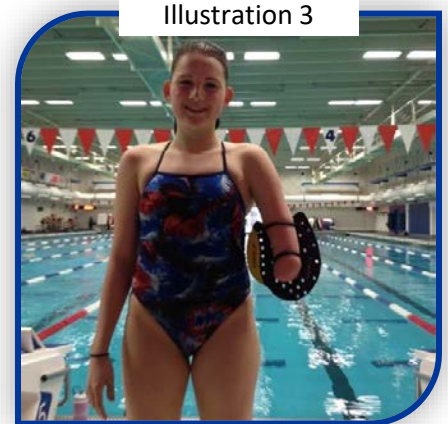


Illustration 4

## HOW DO I ACCOMMODATE ATHLETES IN PRACTICE?

1. Use equipment such as fins or paddles to help the athlete make intervals.
  - a. Different types of fins to accommodate the athlete's impairment. (Illustrations 2, 3 & 4)
2. Have the other swimmers try to swim like the student-athlete with a disability so everyone understands the challenges and how they do it.
3. Modify the distance the student-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.
5. Think out of the box for solutions.
6. Challenge the athlete like you would the rest of the team members and make adjustments for the athlete's impairment.
7. Enable the athlete to be as independent as possible.
  - a. For example, using a sprinkler system for blind athletes to be able to turn without tapping assistance from a coach. (Illustration 5)



Illustration 5

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS DOCUMENT

Queenie Nichols – United States Olympic Committee – Paralympic Swimming

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Julie O'Neill – United States Olympic Committee – Paralympic Swimming