Chapter 13
Inclusive Recreation as Part of the IEP Process

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ABSTRACT

Individuals with disabilities have a long history of exclusion from both education and recreation settings. Until the 1970s, parents caring for their child with a disability was a private, isolated activity and an extreme hardship. Today, children with disabilities are usually included in general education classrooms with their typically developing peers. For inclusive education to be successful, the IEP team must focus on the collaborative aspects and possible community-wide solutions for the child’s best interests by looking outside the classroom to examine the array of community supports that interconnect with the child’s education and long-term transition outcomes over multiple seasons, including summer months. This chapter provides background on inclusive recreation services, including suggestions for how a multidisciplinary IEP team can incorporate existing recreation services and community programs as extended supports within a child’s IEP or transition plan, using Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems framework.

INTRODUCTION

Over 40 years ago, passage of Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA, PL 94-142) required a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) with the least restrictive environment (LRE) to all U.S. children with disabilities ages 3-21. Until PL 94-142 was signed into law in 1975, U.S. children with disabilities did not have a legal right to a public education. Fifteen years later in 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, PL 101-336) provided nondiscrimination protections to individuals with disabilities. This law mandates that all local, state, and federal facilities, programs and services be accessible to individuals of all abilities. ADA legislation applies to all segments of society serving the public, such as education and employment including recreation agencies to provide, “reasonable modifications
or accommodations” in order to enhance program participation for a person with a disability without fundamentally altering the program.

The same year that the ADA was signed into law, PL 94-142 was renamed as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, PL 101-146) and reauthorized in 2004. Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act of 2004 (PL 108-446) identifies a broad range of disability categories related to physical, social, cognitive, and sensory skills, from autism to visual impairments. The amendments to this educational law required that children and youth receiving special education and related services have a clearly written Individual Education Plan (IEP) with defined special education services, activities, and supports that each student will receive in a specified school year. The child’s educational plan must also ensure necessary adaptive equipment is available, as well as transitional service plans for each high school student (Title I amendments IDEA, n.d.).

Transition planning pertains to the specific education services, programs, supports, and linkages put in place to assist youth and families transitioning from secondary school to adult life in domains such as family & friends (socialization), education & work (further education, occupation, and volunteerism), and recreation and leisure (King, Baldwin, Currie, & Evans, 2005). By the end of 2015, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, PL 114-95) was passed into law, reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and replacing the last reauthorization in 2001, otherwise known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This new education law will have a positive effect on children with disabilities, requiring school districts to expand their innovative learning practices to include personalized learning, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and universal design for learning, and integrating technology and competency-based education initiative (Every Child Succeeds Act, 2015). When new legislation is passed, it can take time for schools to incorporate new requirements. Currently, school use MTSS as a means of identifying specific needs of students, developing and delivering an intervention to target that need, and taking data on that intervention on a daily basis.

After four decades since PL 94-142 passed, the IEP remains the primary tool to outline a student’s short-term and long term academic, social, behavioral, and functionally relevant needs for post-school success related to employment, postsecondary education, and independent living. Due to the complexity of the process, IEP teams are still challenged and struggle with the basic procedural IEP development and delivery requirements for cohesive and meaningful educational experiences across the spectrum of disabilities and grade levels (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014). For successful inclusive and educational experiences throughout the formal school years of a child, the IEP team must include collaboration and community-wide solutions for the child’s best interests by implementing a range of evidence-based practices through a multi-tiered systems of support (Odem, 2012; Morningstar, et al, 2016).

With the objective of increasing the options for a child to progress in meeting their IEP goals, this chapter provides suggestions on the use of inclusive recreation services and community programs as “related supports and services” to be written as education or transition outcomes as means to improve a child’s socialization, recreation, vocational skills within a child’s IEP. This chapter, will discuss ways in which community recreation programs and organizations can assist schools and educators in providing educational supports for children. Information will be included on how recreation can be documented as a related or supported service on a child’s IEP by examining the learning opportunities of recreation programs as an excellent setting to further practice practical skills and social competencies needed to achieve IEP goals. As the child develops into adolescence, recreation and community programs can assist the school and student expand their system of supports by introducing multiple community integration strategies that build necessary life skills to improve a student’s transition into postsecondary education,