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## **Field of dreams : sports equality for children with special needs**

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Running Head: FIELD OF DREAMS: SPORTS EQUALITY FOR CHILDREN WITH  
SPECIAL NEEDS

Field of Dreams: Sports Equality for Children with Special Needs  
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### **Abstract**

Currently, there is a lack of equal opportunity for children with disabilities to participate or succeed in both school and club athletics. These programs have a positive effect on the development of children, especially those with disabilities, giving all a chance to socialize and exercise. Society forgets that children, regardless of their ability, deserve the right to grow in an athletic community with their peers. After speaking with parents, faculty, and the children themselves, a conclusion was made that physical activity is an extremely positive experience for the children so that they too can realize they are capable of playing and having fun. To address this issue, an adaptive soccer clinic was run through California State University, Monterey Bay Athletics to provide exposure to sports and share the love of the game with all children. Children with disabilities have the right to participate and it is important to raise awareness that *everyone* can be a part of sports.

### **Setting the Stage**

Through my experiences, I have seen some of the amazing benefits that can occur when children with special needs are finally given the opportunity to play sports. Sports are therapeutic not just physically, but also mentally. When we allow children with special needs to participate and compete in sports, we can watch them grow physically and learn new movement skills. Both fine motor and gross motor skills can be learned while participating in athletics. Besides physical improvement, we see children learning and developing important life skills. Teamwork, compassion, and good sportsmanship, are just a few of the vital qualities that children who play sports learn.

As an athlete, I hope that every child growing up can have the opportunity to play and participate. Regardless of their abilities, they are still growing children who have the same desires and dreams as any other child playing sports. In my opinion, who are we to hold them back? Why should we limit them to being team managers or “water boys?” These students should be on the field, playing and learning about sports, not just watching from the sidelines.

Growing up my parent’s jobs allowed me to work intimately with children with disabilities. With my Dad being a Physical Therapist Consultant for the State of California and my Mom being a Physical Therapist for the Sacramento County Office of Education, I had lots of time to spend with this unique population. Both my Mom and Dad would often times take me to play group or play therapy to engage with the children. Although I enjoyed therapy and loved being around the other kids, I knew from an early age that these children would face hardships. I was not aware of what, but knew that they were somewhat different from myself. Although they were different in some ways, I always knew that they enjoyed playing, learning, and having fun, just as much as myself. To me, this was good enough. I made friends and learned that making judgments would not gain any friends, but lose them. As I continued to grow I began to develop a mindset much different than my peers. This mindset has allowed me to become a valuable asset to this community. With the ability to see past differences, a child’s ability or inability should not prevent them from enjoying the activities that many of our youth participate in. It was this mindset that my parents cherished that allowed them to start an adaptive soccer program in Elk Grove. With their passion towards soccer and the children they work

closely with, Elk Grove has a thriving soccer program that gives these children a chance at having the same opportunities that I had growing up.

In 2007, when I was a freshman in high school I became a part of a great cause. It was in the spring that Elk Grove would begin to work towards creating it's very own adaptive soccer program called TOPSoccer. TOPS, for short, aims at creating equality for these children with special needs with the help of soccer. Their mission is to bring the joys of soccer to any boy or girl with physical and or mental disabilities. TOPS is a community outreach program that runs solely off of the help and support of the community. Coaches and soccer buddies both volunteer their time and resources to these children to ensure that they are in a safe and fun atmosphere, where parents and children can forget about the world and simply enjoy the game of soccer.

When the program started, I was at the frontline of it all. I was lucky enough to be given such a great opportunity to work with this very special group of individuals. The reason for my closeness to the program and to the children is because my parents are the ones who founded and developed the Elk Grove branch of TOPSoccer. Through countless hours of time, energy, and money, my parents, with the help of a fantastic board, were able to successfully start a lasting TOPS program. For years my parents have been heavily involved in the program as president, secretary, manager, buddy coordinator, and coaches. Their hard work and dedication inspired my brother and I to become involved. Starting out as soccer buddies, we helped the club run smoothly and were often times in charge of teaching other young soccer players how to play the buddy role. For those who do

not know what a buddy is, they are usually a soccer player who assists the players of TOPS. The goal of the buddy is to ensure that his/her player is involved and getting touches on the ball, having a good time, and keeping them safe. Our goal is not to play for the player, but to help create opportunities for our player to enjoy the game of soccer. After our roles as buddies, both my brother and I became certified TOPS coaches and my brother even became the head coach of a team.

Seven years later, we have a continuously growing and thriving program. Our players range in age between five and twenty-two years (the age in which they are no longer eligible for public schools). TOPS Elk Grove has grown from twenty-five to sixty-five players. With a total of five teams and over a thousand buddies committing time and effort to the league, our small league has grown into a thriving program. I have personally seen the great benefits of soccer for these children as they have grown and thrived into adult life. With the help of soccer, they were able to branch out, and I have witnessed how these players feel, when given the opportunity to be like “all of the other kids.” Every week, they step out onto the field, wearing their jersey with pride. With so much joy, they grow in soccer and also begin to blossom off the field whether it be at home or in schools. Their confidence increases, they make friends, and get to experience the competition of an amazing sport.

Watching these players grow from when they first enter the program is a great experience. It is for this reason that Molly and I are dedicated to starting our own program similar to TOPSoccer. Both of us grew up in a very sports oriented childhood. Our love of sports did not end when we came to college, it only grew. It is

for this love and passion that we have for sports and exercise, which we feel these children should be granted with these same opportunities. These children deserve to experience the beauty, fun, and great memories that come from sports, just as I did growing up.

**Why is the lack of adaptive physical education and sports programs an issue for students with special needs?**

For most children, sports is the foundation of a lifetime of healthiness and happiness. Children grow and develop through play as they learn valuable life skills while interacting and collaborating with their peers to accomplish goals. Some of these skills are first learned in a structured physical education environment. For those children who wish to further this desire to participate in physical activity, they resort to local clubs and community organizations. These teams help foster social and physical development through activity. While these children enjoy all of these opportunities, there are some children whom are left out. It is the children with special needs whom suffer from the lack of programs available to them. With physical education being cut from schools, and few adaptive programs being available to this population of children, they are missing out on learning opportunities. While their peers make friends, grow, and learn, these children are forced to the sidelines to watch. It is for many reasons that these children are included, but it is for these reasons that we fight for social justice and equality, for all children to enjoy physical activity.

**Safety Issues**

A common theory behind the lack of physical education and sports programs for children with special needs derives from fear. This fear stems from teachers, parents, and

students worrying about the safety of the children who may be injured while participating in athletics. Block (2000) stated that, “the very nature of physical education classes... exposes the teacher to greater liability for accidents and injuries than any other area of the school curriculum” (p.286).

In Block’s book, he describes three major issues that occur while including children with disabilities in general physical education. The first reason is students with disabilities are often times not at the same level as their peers. Block (2000) states that, “speed, strength, stamina, balance, and coordination” (p. 287) are not up to par with their peers. The diverse range of ability can put both students in a dangerous situation. Although physical attributes are important in physical education, cognitive ability is also a huge aspect of sports. Students with special needs are more susceptible to danger because, “cognitive and perceptual ability problems can add to their confusion and inability to react to situations as quickly as their peers” (p. 287). These differences make students with special needs more prone to injury during activities. This creates a liability issue, which is described as a student holding their physical educator as responsible for injuries sustained during class.

The second issue is the severe medical conditions that kids may have. Some students may react poorly to certain types of physical activity, for example students with respiratory issues may have trouble running or partaking in high cardio based activities. Teachers must be informed and updated on students medical records and must be willing to provide quick and immediate medical attention to a student in need. The last issue involves the injury of nondisabled students participating with disabled students. There are risks involved when the two participate in physical education together. Modifying games



or using equipment, such as walkers or wheelchairs, can be dangerous to other participating students. Heavy metal equipment can get in the way, trip, or hurt other students upon impact. Fully functioning students also run the risk of injury while trying to prevent injuries to their peers.

While these are all valid reasons and important safety issues to take into consideration, “safety concerns should not be used as a blanket excuse to simply place all students with disabilities in separate physical education programs... placements need to be made on an individual basis” (Block, 2000, p. 287) While some students may fall into the category of being unable to participate in mainstream sports, all students with disabilities should not be placed in this category. Mainstream sports, much like the concept of mainstream education, refers to the “process of placing students with disabilities in general education classes with appropriate support services as determined by the student’s IEP” (Block, 2000, pg. 29). Like the education format, mainstream sports allow students with disabilities participate in schools with able-bodied students. Safety can still be implemented in mainstream programs as long as teachers are prepared with the help of the students IEP. An IEP, which is an Individualized Education Program or Plan can be described as, “An IEP must be designed for one student and must be a truly *individualized* document. The IEP creates an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators, related services personnel, and students (when appropriate) to work together to improve educational results for children with disabilities” (ED.gov). IEP’s help teachers in fostering the growth and develop of their students physically and mentally.

### **Stereotypes and Stigmas**

Stereotypes and negative stigmas often times disrupt the peace in school environments. Studies have shown that many students are comfortable and encouraging in sports environments when children with disabilities participate in mainstream sports (Block, 2000). Although many students would be happy to assist their classmates with disabilities and modify their sports, there are still students who feel differently. A huge part of this issue stems from the lack of exposure that student's with and without disabilities share with one another.

In 1954 the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled that "separate but equal" was inherently unequal and often times unfair. This translated over to students with disabilities in many ways. "The Brown v. Board of Education decision as well as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 led to an examination of the practice of separating children with disabilities from the mainstream of public education" (Block, 2000, p. 26). These acts were implemented over 50 years ago and are still an issue in schools today. Although they are "legally" included, separation still takes place in our public schools. Creating these walls and boundaries between special needs and regular students can cause stereotypes and other social stigmas to arise. The lack of knowledge and experience makes it difficult to inspire regular education students to include their fellow classmates.

As our legal system has progressed in favor of students with special needs, the labels given often create a larger gap between able-bodied and those with disabilities. While the labeling of a child under the classification of a disability receives funding and support from both local and federal governments, it gives these students an unfair advantage. If a student is labeled "mildly retarded" teachers and students may be more forgiving for abnormal behaviors or cognitive delays, but by labeling a child, you are also

taking away their identity. Instead of being just a little girl or boy in a classroom, labels shape the thoughts that their peers and teachers have about them. In one book the author stated that, “labels shape teacher expectations... Studies on teacher expectations have demonstrated that what teachers believe about student capability is directly related to student achievement” (Henley, Ramsley, Algozzine, 1999, pg. 32). If achievement is truly based on teacher expectations, then how must a labeled child succeed to their full potential in a classroom, when they are not thought to have any potential at all? Without the support or faith from the teacher, we cannot expect student’s peers to be accepting of the student. Instead of looking at the capabilities of the student, their peers will only look at what they cannot do. Students with disabilities need to be encouraged and pushed to excel, rather than to settle. Teachers and students must realize that this motivation can help these students in the classroom, and on the field.

One author stressed that fear could be a factor, simply because the normal population knows very little about people with physical and, or mental disabilities (Block, 2000, pg. 269). Students might reject their peers as their physical education programs are affecting their opportunity to enjoy physical education. While many might feel anger or frustration, some students may feel sympathetic towards their peers. Instead of helping the students with the modified sport, they try to parent the child (Block, 2000). All of these feelings are understandable, but none will help the inclusion process for the students with special needs.

Teachers must address the issue, as they are the advocates for their students. With their help, they can inform and educate their students on the importance of accepting their peers. One author described the importance of teacher involvement by stating, “in order

to be effective, these educators need to be strong advocates for physical activity for all learners, need to embrace human diversity, and need to appreciate individual variations in growth and development” (Rouse, 2009, pg. 3) Although there is no set way of including these children, teachers can help along the process with a positive attitude and inspiring their students to be encouraging of their peers, regardless of ability.

### **Physical Benefits of Adaptive Sports Education and Programs**

Between state and federal budget cuts, increased classroom sizes, and intense academic state standards, physical education is no longer a priority. Now, we must look to outside community resources to fulfill these activities. For our regular population, most communities offer a plethora of athletic options for all ages and skills. Unfortunately, for our students with special needs there are very few options, if any at all, to learn about sports education and develop physically. The State Department of Education wanted to make physical education a core subject because, “physical education in school is the only sure opportunity for all school-aged students to access health-enhancing physical activity and the only school subject area that provides education to ensure that students develop knowledge, skills, and motivation to engage in health-enhancing physical activity for life” (Strauss, 2013, para. 7). Without this knowledge being developed in schools, our students are at a loss. Unless their parents are inspired to teach their children about health, our students will never be educated on this subject and cannot be expected to lead healthy lifestyles.

The *Washington Post* stated that in a recent survey, “nearly forty four percent of school administrators reported cutting significant amounts of time from physical education and recess.” (As cited in Kohl and Cook, 2013, para. 3) With so many

obstacles, teachers are caught in the middle. Having to meet strict standards, they are forced to choose between school subjects. Unfortunately, since physical education is not a core subject, it is a subject that is being neglected, despite the significance it has in children's futures. Without proper education and a sedentary lifestyle students are in danger of increased risks of, "heart disease, colon and breast cancer, diabetes mellitus, hypertension, osteoporosis, anxiety and depression, and other diseases" (Strauss, 2013, para. 7). In even more recent studies the Washington Post stated that the increase of physical inactivity globally, is closing in on the mortality rate of those who die from obesity or cigarette smoking. If these statistics are based off of our regular population, what are the further effects our students with disabilities will suffer when sports education and programs are cut further?

In fact, many researchers claim that the benefits of sports and physical education for children with special needs is more important than for those without disabilities. Children with disabilities have fewer opportunities to participate in activities, both in and outside of school settings. Where children without disabilities have access to school and community activities, children with disabilities do not always have these opportunities. In fact many of these students who are left out and do not participate in these activities, "have limited recreation skills, which greatly restricts their abilities to participate in community activities and interact with peers who do not have disabilities" (Block, 2000, as cited Schleien, 1997 p. 7). This leads to a greater gap between these two communities. As these students are being neglected to participate in schools or communities, we are ostracizing them as an entire group from participating in more than just sports. Children with disabilities can use sports to, "acquire critical lifetime leisure skills including

appropriate behavior and an appreciation for continued participation in active recreational pursuits” (Block, 2000, p. 7). We cannot keep excluding them from everyday activities because as we do, we are creating an even larger gap between the two communities, in which neither will be able to understand the others life or lifestyles.

Students with disabilities’ overall motor skills will improve when certain motions or movements are practiced and critiqued. Muscle memory and strength increases when regiments are practiced regularly, and this could help these students in their everyday life skills. Educators must provide these opportunities for those with special needs to ensure that they can grow and develop as well. One excerpt states that, “Although differences exist, athletes with disabilities exhibit responses to exercise similar to those of able-bodied athletes... In which the “true” differences found are caused by differences in functional muscle mass resulting from paralysis, amputation, or osteoporosis in paralyzed limbs and the severity of the physical impairment” (Depauw & Gavron, 1995 p. 200). Thus stating that those with physical disabilities display some differences, but our natural physiology allows our body to grow and adapt to repeated movements and motions. Through repetition and sports exercise, our bodies develop to these motions and just like able-bodied students; those with disabilities can see change and improvement. Promoting physical activity both in and outside of schools would be highly beneficial for these children. Their bodies can learn to grow, develop, and respond to physical activity, to better create a healthy lifestyle for these children.

### **Psychosocial Benefits of Adaptive Sports Education and Programs**

As stated earlier, there is an immense amount of benefits that occur when children with special needs participate in physical education or adapted sports programs. What is

often forgotten though, is the psychosocial benefits that occur when these same activity opportunities are granted to these children. Sports are a great opportunity for children to learn certain life skills. With a competitive atmosphere and friends involved, the dynamics are different than those of a home or school. These factors need to be taken into account when looking at the skills acquired when children with special needs participate in sports. Laker (2000) described a survey (as cited Underwood, 1983) of sixteen teachers, and asked them what they thought were the benefits of physical education. The results were interesting to Laker as he discovered that, “the top five aims mentioned... were skill acquisition; education for leisure; health and fitness; socialization; and enjoyment. Only two of these are physical, and the other three are affective, social, and cognitive” (p. 15). With so many positive cognitive benefits, the lack of these adapted programs for children with special needs becomes an even larger issue.

For thousands of years, physical activity has been extremely important for societal purposes. A person who is physically active will generally be healthier, and in my opinion, happier. The concept of physical education has even been around since the Ancient Greeks. The Greeks used physical activity to, “develop the body as an equal partner to the minds, or so that a failing body was not a hindrance to the mind” (Laker, 2000, p. 13). To be a balanced individual, both physical and cognitive skills are important for a growing individual, especially those who struggle with health.

Teachers play a crucial role in the physical and mental development of their students. Yes, teachers can force their students to participate in activities, but how will this affect them mentally? To create a well-rounded student, teachers must build their students from the ground up. One-way to do this is to start with building self-confidence

and recognize the concept of self-actualization. Self-actualization can be described as, “the achievement of one’s full potential through creativity, independence, spontaneity, and a grasp of the real world,” (dictionary.com) all which can be attained through physical education. When a student learns through play, they learn how to be creative and they begin to understand their potential.

Including children with special needs in a mainstream physical education classroom, can improve the social development of these children. Inclusion in this environment can be a great tool in teaching student with special needs basic life skills. Learning social cue’s through physical education exposes students with special needs to how to interact with the general public. While our students with disabilities are learning life skills, our non-disabled students are learning how to interact appropriately with these students. They too can learn from these students about how to be encouraging and accepting to anybody of any ability.

Physical education is described as one of the most social school subjects, and this is a great opportunity for students to learn social skills through. Through physical education, we see students who are, “developing problem solving skills, the establishment of self-esteem, and the development of interpersonal skills. Pupils were also expected to develop commitment, fairness, and enthusiasm” (Laker, 2000, p. 17). It is these concepts that allow our students to develop into functioning adults that can grow and function in society, through the help and support of physical education and adapted sports programs.



### **What is being done to support children with special needs in physical activity and other sports settings?**

Now that we have discussed the issues behind a lack of support for children with special needs in sports settings, we will now look into what is being done to level the playing field. Through different legal actions and developing teaching methods, Americans are on their way to helping these children gain an equal opportunity to enjoy sports programs, in and outside of school settings.

#### **Equal Opportunity**

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was a huge step in favor of those with disabilities. This act was designed and implemented in an attempt to end discrimination against those suffering from disabilities. It also provided equal opportunities for these individuals to have their programs and activities funded through federal financial assistance. Besides the financial benefits of this rehabilitation act, it was more importantly created to level the playing field. This act stated that “to be equally effective, a program must offer individuals with disabilities equal opportunity to attain the same results, gain the same benefits, or reach for the same levels of achievement as peers without disabilities” (Winnick, 2000, p. 14). Providing equal opportunities and funding to these students would ensure a fair chance to succeed alongside other students, with or without disabilities. Thus, any institution that does receive federal funding is obligated to offer alternatives or options for students with disabilities to participate if the need exists. If there is no need, the program is not obligated to exist.

Section 504 of this Act is more closely related to our project, as it works in favor of providing equal opportunity within the school districts. Section 504, “obligates school

districts to identify, evaluate, and extend to all qualified students with a disability residing in the district a free and appropriate public education, including modifications, accommodations, and specialized instructions or related aids as deemed necessary to meet their educational needs as adequately as the needs of nondisabled students are met” (Winnick, 2000, p. 14). Accommodations are being created to incorporate special action plans to guarantee that students rights are not violated under Section 504. If related to physical education, schools can request specialized instruction, equipment, or modifications, if it better suits the needs of the students involved. If these rights have been violated, then parents have the right to challenge a school, and the district for inadequately fulfilling the full needs of the student.

Within Americans basic rights, and modified versions such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, it is clear that there are laws pertaining to the equal treatment of students with disabilities. Although these acts have been created, schools are still struggling to respond to the needs of this special population of students. In any high school, you can see your basic sports such as volleyball, basketball, baseball, soccer, swimming, and many more; but how many of these schools have these same sports programs available for their students with disabilities? I know for a fact, my school had zero sports programs readily available on campus for this particular student population. Unfortunately, these student’s basic rights are being stripped everyday, as we neglect to provide these growing individuals with their rights to grow and play sports as children and teens. While their schools play these sports, these students are restricted to watching from the sidelines, only hoping that one day they will get the opportunity to play as well.

If schools are slow to react, their teachers and faculty are likely to be ill inspired to take action for these student's. If we hope to incorporate children with disabilities in everyday activity, then it should start at school. Physical educators need to understand the important role that they play at school and for the community. It starts with them. These teachers need to incorporate these students in the actual activity, rather than confining students to be designated score keepers. Physical educators should be, "facilitating sports participation for students with disabilities," not holding them back" (Winnick, 2000, p. 43). We are doing no good by these students by "protecting" them from these opportunities to participate in physical education. They deserve the right to play and learn like all of the other students that they grow and thrive with in a school atmosphere.

### **Inclusion Methods**

When teaching children with disabilities, there are different methods of teaching that can affect both those with and without disabilities. One method that is beginning to blossom is the Inclusion method. Inclusion method "refers to the process of educating students with disabilities along with their general peers" (Rouse, 2009, pg. 2). Not to be mistaken with mainstreaming, which is a more primitive format of this. Unlike mainstreaming, students participating in inclusion are being supported and the curriculum can be formatted to better suit the needs of the student. Although this concept seems difficult this method would better suit the needs of both regular and special education. Rather than fitting the student into the existing curriculum, the curriculum should be formatted according to the students within the classroom, whether they are able-bodied or not. In reality, "A student with disabilities should be viewed as just another student whose instructional needs

need to be individualized to optimize learning. Individualization can be implemented in an inclusive environment as easily as in a segregated environment. (Block, 2000, pg. 32) Often we forget that regardless of being labeled as “disabled” or a child with “special needs” all students have special needs and at the end of the day are still children. We should help all of our students in any way that we can.

An excellent example stated in Block’s book had to do with physical education in both regular and specially adapted physical education classes. The author states that even in a regular physical education class, no one student is the same. At all ages, there will be students with immense diversity in regards to physical fitness and ability. All students, regardless of ability must participate, but the teacher must adapt the games and lessons to fit the needs of all of their students. This concept is the same with inclusion. Students participating in the inclusion method will have to be accommodated based on their needs as well in a fully functioning classroom environment.

### **Least Restrictive Environment**

Least Restrictive Environment, known as LRE, is another educational method used when educating children with disabilities. LRE is a branch of education similar to inclusion in that both methods hope to support their children and where, “the general goal is to allow children with disabilities to be educated with their peers in the regular classroom to the maximum extent appropriate for learning” (Rouse, 2009, pg. 2). When a general education class is no longer appropriate or feasible for the child, then they go back to a classroom environment that better suits their learning abilities. This allows for students to maximize their potential through the

use of, “special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular physical education environment occurs only when the nature of severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily” (Winnick, 2000, pg. 13). Physical education is generally the easiest and most popular subject to use the LRE method with, besides inclusion.

### **Reverse Mainstreaming**

Reverse mainstreaming is similar to inclusion, where both parties, able-bodied and disabled, work together in certain environments. The difference between the two is, reverse mainstreaming brings the general student population into a special day class to assist their peers with special needs. This method has proven to assist both students with and without disabilities in a process where they both gain knowledge and experience from one another. Students with disabilities, according to Rouse allows, “the individual or personal attention creates a situation in which the students with disabilities are more motivated to participate... Many Other schools now also train peer facilitators specifically for this purpose” (Rouse, 2009, pg. 13) While students with special needs are in a comfortable environment where they are gaining extra assistance from their school peers, also helps the student facilitators in being exposed to working with this special population. This concept helps create a comfortable environment where both parties can learn and grow, which can be facilitated through supportive and educated teachers.

### **Teacher Facilitation**

Teaching our regular education students to include and help their peers when needed will create a calmer atmosphere. If the students are educated about their classmates, there will be little animosity, and the classroom will be able to run smoothly. Knowledge is power in this sense, and if everyone, teachers and students included, feel prepared and informed, the classroom and physical education dynamics will begin to change for the better. Arne Duncan (2013), United States Secretary of Education stated that, “while it’s the coaches job to pick the best team, students with disabilities must be judged based on their individual abilities, and not excluded because of generalizations, assumptions, prejudices, or stereotypes. Knowledgeable adults create the possibilities of participation among children and youth both with and without disabilities” (Homeroom Blog, para 2). As stated here, our educators need to help be the glue that bonds these two groups together. Through positive interactions and social environments, it will allow students to dismiss any negative social stigmas or stereotypes. As our majority students grow, so will our students with special needs.

It is also up to the teachers to create an environment where students of all abilities can succeed while feeling safe and secure. The reassurance of a controlled environment, where teachers and peers are supportive will encourage students to learn and grow. Teachers can help this concept by, “adapting physical education and sports selects and uses teaching approaches and styles beneficial to students, provides individualized instruction and opportunities” (Winnick, 2000, p. 8). Through adapting and supporting students through physical education, we can see confidence grow. Building confidence can help encourage students with disabilities to, go out and play with other students able-bodied or not, and encourage them to try new activities. This concept can be translated

from sports education to the classroom, which is an overall benefit to the student's growth and development.

### **Adapted Physical Education**

Laker describes in his reading that there is a hidden curriculum in the sports environment. Laker describes how society approves of the abilities of those who can excel physically. The competition aspect of sports in schools allows students to exhibit their skills to their peers. Those who play sports get approval from their peers as they represent their team, school, and self to opposing schools and persons. Unfortunately Laker also describes how this sense of pride to some can damage others. While we group our students we are basing them on their abilities and are indicating to the students in the groups, and their peers, that they are less capable. It is described that, "those in more able groups it indicates that they have better abilities and will receive a more advanced version of the knowledge... To those in the less able groups, it means that they are not as able as the other children and they will receive a version that is easier to understand, a watered down and adjusted version of the real thing" (Laker, 2000, pg. 47). While this method can be stressful and demeaning to children with special needs, the Adapted Physical Education (APE) method, bypasses most of these problems.

Adapted Physical Education (APE) is an up and coming method of teaching children with disabilities about sports in a safe environment. APE is described as, "individualized program of physical and motor fitness, fundamental motor skills and patterns...for individual or group games and sports designed to meet the unique needs of individuals" (Winnick, 2000, pg. 4). APE is generally in a more secluded environment, and is only an alternative to help children in a more supportive setting. This method is

used more strictly, and is implemented into education plans, when students need more modifications than a general physical education class could provide.

Usually with a certified teacher, APE is a great method for students who desire to achieve the same objectives, just possibly at a slower pace. APE allows for teachers to, “make simple adaptations such as asking a peer to provide assistance, modifying the equipment and rules of game, or providing alternative activities under the guidance of a trained adapted physical education specialist do little to disrupt the learning environment while creating a productive and enjoyable physical education experience for all students” (Block, 2000, pg. 19) APE is a great method, when funding is available, to help include students in a physical sports education environment. In this educational setting, students can more freely work on aspects of their physical fitness that may need to be more closely regulated. Here, students can have stricter priorities, for example a student may need to work on physical fitness, or more motor skill development. It is more uniquely based on the needs of the students participating, rather than the set curriculum for able-bodied students.

### **Methods Section**

For this Capstone Project the researchers investigated how parents of children with special needs view adapted sports programs in and outside of schools, and what they think could be done to improve it. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, the researchers used what they have learned and formulated an action that responded to the focus issue in a way that inspired, informed, or involved a particular audience. Typical school setting physical education are ran with students with disabilities as permanent scorekeepers,



cheerleaders, or little to no exercise because there simply are not enough resources to provide for their specific needs. These students are often neglected because it is commonly believed that they are unable to “properly” and “safely” participate because they are “lacking” some of the required skills. The reality is that these children are being labeled as a disabled child, which emphasizes their differences, rather than a child with disability, which highlights that they too are part of our society instead of an outcast. In order to help decrease the epidemic of unequal opportunity for children with disabilities, we have decided to run our own adaptive soccer clinic for youth in Monterey County to get physical activity and give them an opportunity to play sports with a peer group of more equal skills.

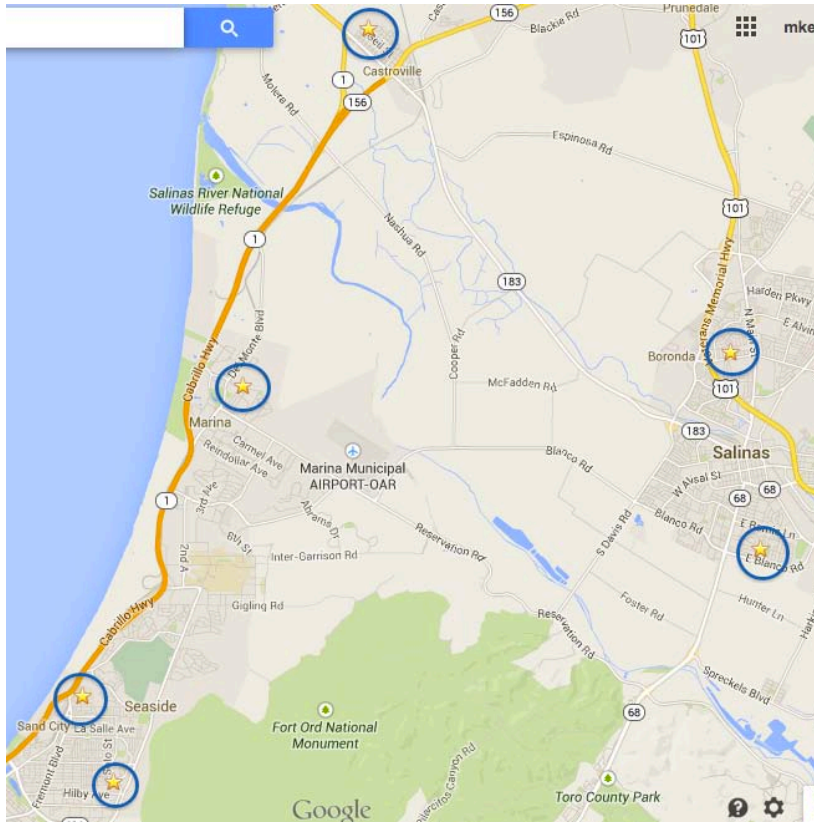
### **Context**

After learning more about physical education and the benefits of special needs students, it is believe that physical education and exercise is the route that all students need to be taking to develop themselves more as individuals and as members in a large group. When involved with physical education, there seems to be a sense of growth within each individual student, but also in their self-confidence as well. All children use P.E. time or recess to let out excess energy and blow off steam, this making it that much more important for special needs students.

### **Participants and Participant Selection**

To gain participants for this project, we reached out to schools all across Monterey County. With aggressive flyering at local schools, community hotspots and our campus, word of mouth, social media, and community partners, we got the small community of parents with children with special needs to start talking about our

clinic. Our efforts were not about “selecting” participants because our goal is to provide an adapted physical education. All our efforts encouraged seven brave



young athletes out to our clinic on May 3rd. We had two elementary students from Monterey Peninsula School District (MPUSD), two elementary students from Salinas Unified School District, two high school students

from MPUSD, and one middle school students from North Monterey County Unified School District. The age range was from five to eighteen, and we had only two years of soccer experience total. The map above highlights the schools we received participants from, it is apparent that our campaigning helped us to gather participants from opposite ends of the Monterey County.

### Researcher

We have both worked in several elementary classroom where the entire class suffered because of the lack of knowledge and background on how to best help these types of students. Being athletes and minority in the classroom, we have used sports as an outlet our entire lives, so we are well versed in encouraging more young

people to as well. We have an interest in making all classrooms flow more cohesively without leaving any students behind through sports and physical education. All children deserve the opportunity to benefit from all the advantages of physical activity and exercise.

Working closely with many mainstreamed young girls on the volleyball court as a coach and being a strong leader and certified coach of TOPSoccer, a Class 5 Soccer organization designed to help children with disabilities have the opportunity to play soccer, we have a lot of experience coaching and being involved in sports and some . We have both participated in and led sports clinics in the past; thus making us qualified to lead clinics and facilitate learning of soccer for our participants. We are interested to see more of the differences when working more closely with special needs students compared to full functioning participants, and how we can better meet their needs a our focus of the clinic.

### **Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions**

Interviews taken during this aspect of the project seemed to vary from other projects, in that interviews were more conversational. This technique was used to gain a more personable viewpoint on the topics, rather than having a specific templated interview. Using this method encouraged the interviewees to realize that everyone is on the same side, and working to build programs to help children with special needs. The information gathered during these interviews gave a greater insight to the importance of the project. Along with this, interviewees were able to more open and creative in their statements.

While a template interview asks specific questions, the open interviews allowed the interviewee to run with topic, and was on their terms. The interviews turned into conversations where the interviewee set the pace and got to speak more freely on their own thoughts and concerns. Information was more easily gathered this way, because the interviews were short and sweet. The conversations being had to extract information seemed more honest than having those being interviewed writing extensive and thought out opinions. Our strategy was to very loosely follow a set of questions for faculty and parents of children with special needs. For faculty or staff the questions were as follows:

- 1) How much P.E. or physical activity do your students get on a weekly basis?
- 2) What kinds of activities do your students participate in?
- 3) What kinds of activities have you tried that your students enjoyed? And what activities do you think they would enjoy participating in?
- 4) What are the reactions of your students when they participate in physical activity? Is there a difference in their behavior in the classroom?
- 5) If available, do you think parents would take action to help their child be able to participate in physical activities outside of school (after school or on the weekends)?
- 6) What are your personal thoughts and opinions on sports programs for children with disabilities outside of school?
- 7) Would you be interested in speaking about any of these questions further in a face-to-face interview?

In speaking with parents, we again, kept it conversational, but really focused on getting a better idea of the kind of physical education program their child was currently enrolled in, how much exercise their child was receiving on a weekly basis, whether or not they would be interesting in an adaptive physical education program, and for clinic parents, if they would attend again. The following are the questions we loosely followed in interviewing parents:

- 1) What sort of physical activities does your child participate in?
- 2) What have been your experiences with Adapted Physical Education (APE) for your child?
- 3) What is being done by the schools to improve the physical education or APE experience for your child? How do you feel about what is being done?
- 4) What would you like to be done to improve P.E. or APE for your child at school?
- 5) If there is not an APE program at your child's school, how would you feel about one being implemented? Why?
- 6) What do you see as the challenges or barriers to implementing such a program?
- 7) Would you be interested in having your child participate in additional physical activities outside of the classroom as an afterschool program or weekend activity?
- 8) What are your thoughts on APE programs built specifically for children with disabilities? What are your thoughts on including children with disabilities into mainstream P.E. or sports programs?
- 9) Do you have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding inclusion P.E. or APE programs?

10) What is the biggest roadblock you have faced in trying to get your child to be physically active inside and outside of school?

11) Have you thought about improving or altering the P.E. or APA program at your child's school?

12) Do you notice a change in your child's behavior (i.e. focus, academic performance, socialization, etc) after they are physically active for 30 min+ or on a regular basis?

### **Procedure**

The first step in completing this project was getting the okay to run an adaptive sports soccer clinic through the pre-existing "Otter Pup Sports Camps" run by the CSUMB athletic department. Once Kirby Garry, athletic director at CSUMB, gave his approval for the program, the whole process really took flight. Flyers were made to outreach to community partners like STAR RIDERS in marina and the Monterey County Special Olympics, as well as local schools in all of Monterey County's school district. To help run the clinic, volunteers were needed, so via CSUMB athletics, nearly twenty student athletes and a coach were gathered to help the cause and provide more individualized help for the athletes participating.

A huge part of this project was understanding the clinic from all perspectives, so the entire clinic was documented with video and pictures, along with the use of social media sites like Twitter and Instagram with the hashtag #OtterPupStars. This helped the researchers track the entire clinic from multiple perspectives of the staff and volunteers, while videographers interviewed parents to gain valuable feedback and capture special moments like children's faces while scoring goals.

Post clinic, surveys were sent out to volunteers to see if an impact was made on them after working with children with special needs. Researchers were able to go back in and look at video interviews from parents to get their feedback and opinion on how the clinic was run.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected from these interviews was qualitative. Thus, the interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes regarding, the need for programs for children with disabilities, interest by athletes to participate and time spent exercising.

## **Results Section**

After the interview process was completed, we had hardcopy information and data to analyze from seven interviewees amongst the undocumented conversations with nearly thirty people who have been or just started working with children with special needs. There was a wide variety of people interviewees, ranging from: teachers of children with special needs, parents with children with special needs, volunteers of the event, athletes themselves, to faculty and staff who work with children with special needs outside of school in an athletic setting. The responses have been categorized into further subheadings based on common emergent themes.

### **Lack of Physical Education Programs**

Naturally, the pull for this project was because of a focus issue, and in this case it is the inequalities in physical education for children with special needs. Not only is there a discrepancy in the amount of time children with disabilities are

getting to exercise compared to their mainstream peers, but there is also a lack of adaptive physical education (APE) programs for these children outside of school. Sadly, most children with special needs are forced to sit out or be so severely modified that they are not able to gain the benefits in exercise. An aide of an autistic class of School X, describes his experience with adaptive physical education programs for his students by saying "...I know of a few students that participate with sports programs. In High School we had a special ed student help our team with equipment and water duties" (Personal Communication, April 28, 2014). Through our interviews it was apparent that there was a needs for APE programs in the Monterey region, yet there has been little effort to create one. Many of the children are struggling to even have the opportunity to "graduate" from scorekeeper and water boy. Most programs offered are small community based parents groups offering support for one time events.

Some of the events that are offered to children with special needs are not small enough or properly staffed to give each athlete the one-on-one attention they need in order to feel comfortable and be properly supported. Part of working with children with special needs to make sure that the needs of the individual child are met, thus taking the time to get to know them and work with them is half of the success. A parent of a child X in the clinic commented on this saying, "...because very often people end up ignoring my son because of his resistance and go on to others" (Personal Communication, May 3, 2014). Some children require a little extra push, and it is important to remember that each child may not learn the same way, and celebrating differences can make the difference for these children.



### **Desire to Participate**

Even though adaptive physical education and sports programs are scarce in the Monterey region, there is a huge interest. Parents and volunteers, both expressed that there was a desire for these programs, and all were eager to help. Through our clinic, our goal was to inform our community within the CSUMB athletic department of the lack of equality for children with special needs in a sports setting. The community on campus grew immensely after the day of our clinic, and is now eager to fight for the cause, by encouraging our campus to host more events such as these in the near future.

Post clinic, there were already requests for more clinics. Parents and volunteers alike were eager to share their opinion about the clinic. In communicating with our parents, one expressed his gratitude and was inspired to help with the cause furthermore. In an email Parent of child X stated, "So, I would like to offer my assistance to any future events that you're running for special needs children. It's very difficult to get good turnouts for these things, because many parents feel like I do. But, both my wife and I work in education... and we both would like to assist in promoting any other of these great camps that you may want to run in the future" (Personal Communication, May 4, 2014). Parents and volunteers alike, gained something from the clinic and was seen as a great learning opportunity by all. While the athletes got to enjoy soccer, the volunteers became exposed to these children, and were able to see them in a new light. They were all able to learn that these athletes are the same as the rest, and are now committed to fighting for equality. The volunteers were excited for more opportunities such as these.

Volunteer M stated, “I had so much fun! When are you guys hosting another clinic, and how can we get more of our team involved in helping?” (Personal Communication, May 4, 2014). After the clinic, it was important to hear feedback from our volunteers, and were excited to hear of their excitement and eagerness to become more involved.

Through the success of the clinic, the clinic was given other opportunities to help spread awareness and become involved with the special needs community. Prior to the clinic communication lines were opened with the Special Olympics director, and used her input and resources to help campaign. After seeing the success of the Otter Pup Stars clinic, the clinic was asked to have a soccer station at the 2014 Monterey County Special Olympics. Here volunteers were encouraged to continue to help participate and spread sports equality. Volunteers worked many hours and worked with over 465 children with special needs on the day of the event. After the event the director of an APE program sent us an email saying,

“Thank you so much for putting on the soccer clinic at the Special Olympics. I have gotten back so much positive feedback about your participation. The students usually have a lot of wait time between events and the soccer was just the right activity and you guys are so good with the students. I look forward to working with you in the fall and getting CSUMB students involved” (Personal Communication, May 11, 2014)

After this email, volunteers were even more excited as they could now see the differences they were making. Many are still raving about future involvement and are excited to participate further.

Through this event, Otter Pup Stars was able to gain more opportunities to work with this special population. At the event, local schools approached the booth

and faculty members were thrilled at the idea of their students learning soccer skills at the Olympics. Some even asked if the Otter Pup Stars clinic would do private trainings at the schools. The goal is for the children to be exposed to different sports, and learn about the values of sportsmanship. With these great opportunities, the clinic is already reaching out to more volunteers to continue this process as our organization grows.

### **Impact and Raising Awareness**

The entire goal of the project was to build a more closely knit community in the Monterey region for parents and children alike to experience athletics. The secondary hope was to encourage more people who are not directly linked to children with special needs to get involved and not only help raise awareness of the issues, but also fight for the cause. Volunteers were having realizations about the functionality of these children, which was part of the education process we were hoping to draw out of college student volunteers. Volunteer C reflected on her experience with the athletes and said, “Many of the children with special needs had so much joy and loved just having someone to play with. This was a good reminder that they are normal kids just with different abilities, traits, and challenges” (Personal Communication, May 7th, 2014). She was able to realize how similar the athletes that participated are to everyday mainstream athletes, and not much was done to adapt the games to ensure each child would succeed.

Other volunteers had their eyes opened to the opportunities in working with children with special needs. Children with special needs and athletics are not typically words one would hear in the same sentence, but on clinic day, it they were

everywhere. Some of the feedback from volunteers was that helping out at the clinic made them realize this was something they were interested in, and found great joy in doing. Volunteer E was so thrilled about her time with Otter Pup Stars, she was considering going into the field. She commented on this,

“It made me realize I was being ignorant. There is nothing to be afraid of, these kids aren't out of control, they just need a little more encouragement and sometimes a little bit of help. It made me so much more willing to work with kids who have special needs. It has also made me consider going into adaptive physical education. This was something that forced me to open my eyes and helped me find something that I really enjoy doing” (Personal Communication, May 8, 2014).

This was a huge step in moving forward with our clinic. As facilitators, it was a goal to open the eyes of others, which would encourage everyone to see these children with disabilities, as functional athletes, rather than athletes who require accommodations. In this case in particular, it was possible, and hopefully Volunteer E can use the Otter Pup Stars program as an example to build an APE program where she lives.

### **Conclusion**

The issue starts with the lack of physical education in schools, and cycles around. Through budget cuts and ill-prepared staff members, students with special needs lose out on vital learning opportunities. While these are issues, it can be solved with the implementation of adapted physical education programs. There is a huge need for these programs within local schools, in order to help foster the growth and development of our students through the usage of sports. Once the programs have been created, communities can see a growth in the commitment that members have towards this strict population. Getting the support of the community

for programs such as these is vital, because without support these programs will slowly die. Through this program, the community can keep these programs alive and thriving. If they are committed to the process they are now a community full of members who are spreading awareness about the inequalities these children face. By leveling the playing field, we are creating the opportunity for these children to be active members of their community, members who are eager to live a healthy lifestyle through the support of sports. The cycle comes back full circle when the community involved sees the inequalities in physical education and sees the need for more outside programs. With each turn of the cycle, a new APE program is build or tried to give these children with special needs the chance to be an athlete. Some programs succeed and can help and foster new programs in the future, while others die out. No matter the end result, each new circle brings in a larger community, a new strategy, and more hope to creating a more level playing field for all athletes.

### **Identification and Evaluation of Action Options**

With the current budget cuts in schools, children are missing out on “extra” programs such as physical education, which is plays a vital role in the enhancement of a child’s overall education, whether it be socially or physically. Often, children with special needs are forced to sit out of activities because they are not considered to be mentally or physically able. Sadly, a population that is considered to need the most attention is suffering the consequences of society’s ignorance to the importance of physical education. In hopes of bringing more attention to the physical education deficit within schools, people are beginning to reach out and create options and programs to

ensure children with disabilities are getting the appropriate time participating in physical activity that they are entitled to, mandated by state and federal laws.

### **Action Options**

Depending on the needs of a variety of students, specific programs have been developed to include children with disabilities in the classroom. Three options discovered to help bring students with disabilities the opportunity to participate in sports programs were: 1) “pull-in” programs or inclusion P.E. at school; 2) Adapted Physical Education (APE) programs and clinics outside of the classroom; and 3) APE programs designed specifically for children with special needs within school. Inclusion and “pull-in” programs are designed to have children with disabilities participate in physical education with fully functioning mainstream students. In successful “pull-in” programs, teachers explain the lesson and then act more as facilitators of the activity as there is equal learning and sharing occurs between all the students. Children with disabilities are participating just as much in physical activity as the rest of the students, thus teaching both parties to work alongside one another. APE programs outside of schools, can be anything from clinics to entire sports leagues designed specifically for children with disabilities. These programs range from individual learning plans to group and team exercise and competition. Trained and licensed teachers with a background in APE create the programs to help the participants exercise in a facility just for them and on an equal playing field with their peers. There is more freedom because the government is not required to support, fund, or watch over these activities. APE programs within a school are specifically designed programs within school hours for children with disabilities to participate in as a replacement for their regular P.E. time. These programs require

government funding and support as well as adapted equipment for the students to use on a regular basis. APE within the school helps students get individualized and specific exercise during regular school hours. Teachers are trained and have an appropriate background to help the students grow in their motor skills at a slower pace.

### **Evaluation of Action Options**

In order to evaluate the action options provided, there had to be some standard criteria to base the critique on. The evaluation criteria selected were, the cost of the program being implemented, the impact the program could have, and the sustainability and longevity of the program. Cost has a significant impact on the element of evaluation because with the current budget cuts in schools and recession in the United States, there is less funding to provide physical activity of children with disabilities especially since its importance is not widely known. Impact refers to the people who will be a part of and be affected by the program set in place. Community, faculty and staff, children with disabilities, full functioning students, and parents or guardians of these students are all important parties that can and will be affected by the programs set in place inside or outside of schools. Lastly, the sustainability of a program is important because building a great program for one year is not going to help as much as designing a program that is set to stay in place for many years. Having a program that can withstand many years of use will help all the people impacted and hopefully, continue to benefit everyone. In table 1.1 the action options are being evaluated based on the criteria on a high, medium low scale.

Table 1.1	Cost	Impact	Sustainability
“Pull-In” or Inclusion P.E.	High	High	Medium

APE programs/clinics outside of school	Low	High	High
APE programs through school	High	Low	Low

In terms of cost, a program would receive a high if it required a lot of private or government funding to keep it running. A medium rating would mean the program can be full-functioning without a significant amount of money; however, cannot survive entirely on volunteers or donation. A low score would mean the program does not require much money to be successful, and could thrive on very little money. Some things taken into account when evaluating cost were, government funding, private funding, grants, cost to participate, need for adapted equipment, salary of staff and faculty, and use of volunteers. Assessing the impact of the programs on the students or participants involved was the most important evaluation criteria. The number of students reached, faculty needed, and knowledge gained by parents and community was used to evaluate the impact of a program. High ratings would mean each of these groups was impacted by the program, a medium rating meant two or three of the groups were impacted, and a low rating indicated that one or no groups were impacted. For sustainability, there were several factors used to rate this category, including a steady flow of participants using the program, available staff and faculty, volunteers willing to help, cost and appropriate budget of the program, and success of the program and satisfied or unsatisfied customers/participants. A high in this category means the program is expected to last for many years, a medium rating would mean there is hope the program will last because two or three of the criteria are met on an annual or monthly basis, and a low rating would mean, the program is rocky because it relies heavily on all the criteria being met.



**“Pull-in” and inclusion programs.** These types of programs are expensive because of the strict public school guidelines put in place by the government. Being a government program requires them to have more regulations, but allows them to receive funding and support. Teachers must be educated on how to incorporate a child with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. Besides certain equipment, students will need the support of all teachers to fulfill their IEP. An IEP is an Individualized Education Plan. IEPs help students fulfill educational goals that would be harder to achieve without support. Specialized equipment may need to be purchased to adapt some games, to make them more easily achievable. Teachers must collaborate and be educated on the student and their IEP goals for the year.

All individuals that attend the school can be impacted by this action, which is why it has been marked as high. Teachers and faculty will be impacted, because they must accommodate these students within their classrooms or in everyday campus life. The entire student population is impacted because students must learn to work with students with disabilities in their daily school lives. In classrooms and during physical education, these students will have to learn to adapt with this new population of students. This can be a great learning opportunity for both full functioning students as well as those with special needs because students will learn to be leaders and followers; allowing students to experience new roles in the classroom.

Pull-in inclusion is not very sustainable because the program depends heavily on government funding, and the programs cannot survive without help, thus it gained a ranking of medium for the sustainability category. Teachers and students will have to become more involved and become accepting of all students. Teachers and parents often

question if this method is truly beneficial, if the success of the program is based on how others react and work with students with special needs. Teachers must also be extremely patient, and must learn to include these students within everyday class life. This method can pose to be a challenge for a diverse classroom, where every student learns and succeeds in different ways and rates. Thus the success of the program and its ability to be sustainable relies heavily on how people react to one another and the benefits of the program; making it either very affective or a terrible disaster. There is too much dependency on people's interpretation to receive a high rating.

Adapted physical activity in sports clinics and outside school programs earned a low rating, because they are significantly cheaper because these leagues are not funded by the government, but rely instead on fundraising and sponsorships. These programs have the opportunity to join with local leagues and organizations. Local soccer, baseball, swim, or other athletic organizations can create an alliance where they rely on one another for financial support. Leagues are cheaper to run when they have a partnership in which they share one another's gear and field locations. All of these costs can be kept to a minimum with a functioning support system.

The people benefitting from this action include all participants in the program as well as the volunteers from the community, parents, staff and faculty running it, thus earning it a rating of high. The program will obviously benefit the children with special needs being included or having their own separate leagues, but many others will gain something from this. Parents will get the opportunity to watch their children grow and develop, while watching from the sidelines. Volunteer's benefit by supporting the cause to raise awareness of the inequalities that occur in athletics. These able-bodied volunteers

learn to coach and work with children with special needs. This has been proven to be very beneficial in the development of these children as well. Schools also benefit from this because there are now other options for education and development outside of the school systems.

Sports camps and clinics outside of school is a more sustainable option because these camps rely on community members for support. Within most communities there will always be volunteers to help with these programs. High schools and junior high's are great places to look for support and volunteers. These students are usually in need of community service hours and will be a more positive source. Through connections with other local leagues and the community there will be a greater support system. These specialized programs can also run off of donated or shared equipment to help lower costs. The cost is minimum because of fundraising and donations, and with a steady flow of volunteers to run it, APE sports camps and clinics received a high rating.

Adapted physical education in schools is a great opportunity for students, but is really expensive. This section was graded as being high in cost. This program also needs significant government funding to keep it running. Many schools in fact have begun to cut out these programs because of funding issues. The programs must be funded, but teachers must also be trained and educated. Certain credentials will be needed to teach this subject, and this requires a higher teacher salary. IEPs would also need to be followed closely to ensure that students were achieving these goals. Although expensive, these programs are great for children with disabilities. It gives them a chance to succeed on a level playing field. The programs are adapted to help the child succeed, and they get time to learn without their able-bodied peers, all during school hours. The learning is

more unique and personal. The cost to have the program is extremely expensive for the school and government; however for parents it is a convenient way to get their child individualized learning at a lower cost.

The impact of these programs received a lower score because children with special needs are the only ones who develop and they receive the biggest impact as a result of the program. Teachers can be impacted by the difference they are making in their students lives, and so can other students who help out during class. These people gain experience and knowledge of working with children with disabilities. It also received a low score because it does not make as big of an impact on everyone else as the other options do. The population served from this action is very impacted, yet so small, that it did not receive a higher rating.

Sustainability wise, this section also received a low score. The success of the program relies so heavily on the willingness or ability of the government to support or fund the program. In recent years these programs have become a dying breed for many schools and districts, since there is less and less money being funneled to physical education programs every year, let alone adapted programs. Lack of funds also means a lack of equipment available for the students. Although there will be no adapted equipment, there is still opportunity for the equipment to be shared with the mainstream education programs, which gives the program hope; but with moderate to severe disability, recycled equipment is not going to be enough.

### **Evaluation of Evidence**

In order to complete this project, extensive research was done to ensure that the action would truly be beneficial to children with special needs. Over countless hours of researching, a conclusion was made that sports were extremely important for these

children. It only made sense now to create a program that would fulfill all of these benefits to these children. Countless sources were able to express positive outcomes and benefits when children with special needs participated in physical activity, however, some stuck on in particular.

One of the most valuable pieces of the research conducted was to learn why physical education is so important to children. The State Department of Education wanted to make physical education a core subject because, “physical education in school is the only sure opportunity for all school-aged students to access health-enhancing physical activity and the only school subject area that provides education to ensure that students develop knowledge, skills, and motivation to engage in health-enhancing physical activity for life” (Strauss, 2013, para. 7). Research showed that both physical education and adaptive sports programs are important in the fact that they promote lifelong healthiness. It is important for these children to develop and grow physically, while learning skills that will allow them to lead healthier lifestyles through activities. An action needed to be taken that offered physical activity to the participants because the research showed that was the most important aspect of the project.

Physical education and outside sports organizations also proved to be extremely important to a child’s cognitive and social development. Research showed that there are more than physical benefits, which allow for these children to learn valuable life lessons and skills through sports that allow them to grow and function in and outside of school. These skills that they acquire, “promote social factors such as how to interact with peers, play cooperatively, take turns, deal with anger, follow directions, listen quietly, stay on task, and behave appropriately” (Block, 2000, p. 263). All of these skills can help

students with special needs interact with people outside of the school environment, which is extremely important.

Often times it is forgotten that these children with special needs are still just growing children. There is too much focus on the disability itself and the limitations these children have, rather than celebrating their abilities. Adapting sports and recreational activities is not as challenging as many people tend to believe. A community can easily come together to support the needs of these children. With so many physical and mental benefits, these programs should be more easily accessible and implemented into more community programs. The research supported that there is an overall lack of opportunity for these children. Through parent and community support, these options can be made possible.

### **Decision Making**

After weighing the options for implementing a program and talking with stakeholders and parties involved, we recommend running an APE sports clinic. The APE clinics are low in cost, make an impact at the community level, and it is the most sustainable option of the three presented. Through the athletic department at California State University, Monterey Bay and their Otter Sports Camps/Clinics, creating an adapted sports clinic was made easier because an umbrella organization was willing to make this clinic a part of their existing program. This decreased the cost of organizing a clinic because the set up process was already completed. Additionally, with established connections for equipment, volunteers, grants, and fundraising, an adapted clinic would contribute to the success of the existing program. To achieve a greater level of impact, we will reach out to student-athletes and middle school peer groups to help raise awareness

about adapted physical activity and get some socialization and peer interaction for the participants that they would have gotten if the “pull-in” or inclusion option was chosen. Because we chose to add on to a preexisting program, we are more likely to have a sustainable program. With an abundance of student-athlete volunteers to help out every clinic, and the athletic staff to assist in grant proposals and fundraising, it seems as though this program is properly budgeted and set up to have available money in the long run.

In selecting this choice, we made the assumption that people would be interested in participating and volunteering to make the clinic possible. Hopefully through advertising and word of mouth, we can fill up the clinic and appeal to many volunteers as a cause worth their time and resources. By raising awareness with this clinic, we are assuming that people will care about our cause. To battle this we are hugely advocating for our program by sharing our knowledge with others.

### **Our Position**

All three options are extremely important for the development of children with special needs. All programs will aid these children in achieving their goals, but there are both positive and negatives to all options. Option two, which is clinics and programs outside of school, seemed to score the highest. This method seems to be the best in regards to cost, impact, and sustainability. Although this was the best, the other two have great benefits as well. The “pull-in” inclusion method allows students that are able-bodied and disabled to participate in physical education together, rather than being segregated. Through this method, both groups can learn and grow from one another. Their involvement in one another’s education can also create a tighter-knit community.

The third option, Adapted physical education programs in schools, is also a great opportunity. This program is expensive, but extremely beneficial for students with disabilities. In these programs, there are hired and trained teachers that are highly educated in this field. The support and education being taught by these individuals would be the best education possible. It would be safe for students because of the more individualized attention involved.

One large assumption that threatens the second option, which is outside sports clinics and programs, is finding a community partner. This particular one relies solely on the communities' ability to provide volunteers and support for these specialized leagues. Without funding and support from the community and its businesses, these programs cannot survive. Programs can be started, but need to be maintained by individuals who are willing to work free of charge. One negative outcome of this option would be the overall lack of community partnership. The organization without a sister league there for support, will need more money and funding. If a partnership cannot be established then the program fails. This is seen as a major flaw, as we are assuming that the community will be there for support financially and physically.

### **Conclusion**

Through our personal experiences, we have discovered that when it comes to programs such as these, the community really does listen. Sometimes these ideas are not a part of a person's everyday thought process. The general population does not think of the benefits and needs of supporting or founding these specialized programs. Community members often times need a little inspiration and a slight push to getting these organizations formed and running. We understand the flaws of our idea, but realize that any idea will



have some flaws to it. For our particular capstone, starting a community based organization, which we would name Otter Pup Stars, based on a previously established Otter Pups program. This option seemed to be the best option for us in regards to financials, impact, and sustainability. There are strengths and weaknesses in all options, but the second option is more reliable, even during harsh economic times. With the help of our community partners at CSUMB, we feel that our program can succeed and benefit the community. Because our organization is available to the entire community, school funding or resources no longer divide us. The Otter Pup Stars program is an opportunity for all children with disabilities in the Monterey district to enjoy athletics. While being involved in our program, friendships and partnerships are formed that can help the program survive and thrive for many years to come.

### Action Documentation and Reflection

Our goal was to initiate support through sports to the children with special needs in the greater Monterey region. Through this action we hoped to encourage parents



and children to participate in sports settings, whether it be in a school or outside sports program. We hoped to expose our

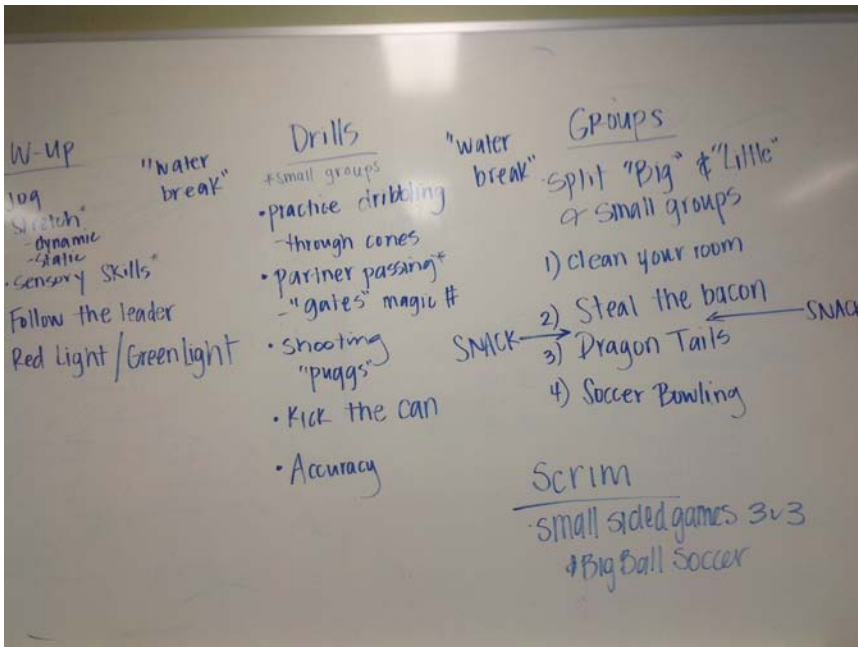
athletes to the wonderful benefits that sports has to offer, both physically and mentally. Besides encouraging these children to participate, we also hoped to reach out to the general population at CSUMB the importance of these programs. Many of our volunteers had never been around children with special needs, especially in a sports setting. Through our Otter Pup Stars program, we were able to promote equality for all children to participate in sports, while proving to the general public that regardless of ability, these children deserve an equal shot at participating in sports programs that allows them to grow and develop. Reaching out to our athletic department was important to not only us, but to the athletes that helped participate. Our athletes whom have strong backgrounds in competitive settings began to realize the lack of opportunity these children face on a daily basis. The inequality helped them realize that they to take a stand and promote these programs by helping out and spreading the word about sports equality.

Going into our clinic we had created a well thought out camp that included stretching, skills and drills, games, and even snacks. We felt prepared going into the camp with an extensive list of adaptive drills and games available to our incoming athletes. The night prior to our camp, we held an informational meeting for our volunteers that gave them a quick run through of the camps schedule and lists of games and activities. Feeling confident, we went into Saturday morning with butterflies in our stomach and a great sense of preparedness.

On clinic day, absolutely nothing went according to plan. No amount of prep time could have gotten us ready for our athletes. Warm-ups and ice breaker games were scheduled to last thirty to forty five minutes, and only lasted for ten as our

athletes began complaining of tiredness. Breaks were frequent and drawn out, and every break seemed to require snacks. The games we had set up either lasted an hour, or were completely pointless. Although nothing went according to plan, we could not be happier with our results of our play day.

While most of the day did not go according to plan, we were completely satisfied and used this as a learning opportunity. Although we were prepared, what



we realized is that being prepared will only get an individual so far in this business. Creativity and flexibility are key to coaching children with

special needs. The games we encouraged our volunteers to demonstrate were played, but volunteers modified the games as they were played. We, along with our volunteers, learned that we could not prepare ourselves completely for the camp. The games were played depending on each athletes abilities and desire to participate. Others such as “kick the can” or “dragon tails” were enjoyed, stretching and “clean your room” did not seem to interest many athletes. For next time, we will create more games that encourage certain aspects of the game that we hope to

teach. An example would include more passing games, that require sharing the ball and collaborating with teammates to achieve certain goals.

Time constraints was our biggest obstacle to overcome. With only a semester, we had to plan accordingly to allow ourselves enough time to campaign to the community about the Otter Pup Stars Clinic being offered. While we immediately got to business planning, we only had so much time to send out our fliers. Our athletes came from all over Monterey County, but many parents mentioned that they were not informed of the event until a week prior. This seemed to be our only fallback, and we hope to begin the campaigning process much sooner for our future clinics.

As our society gets further involved with technology, for our future clinics, we will continue to use social media to portray our volunteers perspectives. This

aspect of our clinic was very beneficial in spreading awareness and informing the public on the social injustices our children face when we neglect to provide them with opportunities in sports settings. Social



media also gave allowed our volunteers to use their private accounts to help spread the word about our clinic through their eyes. The documentation provided by our

volunteers allowed the media to see adaptive sports programs from their point of view. #OtterPupStars was used leading up to our play day, and even after.

Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, all used our hashtag to document the entire event. As facilitators of this program, we also used this to get a sense of how our volunteers felt about the program. Looking up the hashtag after the event brought us great joy when we got to read about how much fun everyone had. Volunteers raved about the event and are extremely eager to continue to the program and participate in future activities.

### **Critical Reflection**

Until now, I have always lived in the shadow of my parents. Growing up my parents have always been facilitators of equality for those suffering from a disability. As physical therapists my parents have always been advocates for this population and are heavily involved with this community. In high school my parents started an adaptive soccer league in Elk Grove that allows for children with special needs to participate in weekly practices, games, and sometimes weekend tournaments, during the regular soccer season. Through this, I was able to gain knowledge about how to start a league. I never thought it was possible to start a league until Molly and I managed to succeed in this task this spring. For the first time in my life, I felt that I had escaped the shadows of my parents. Molly and I succeeded in building and developing an adaptive sports clinic, with the support of the CSUMB athletic department.

Through this project I learned a lot about myself. I have discovered that I too can be as great as my parents. I am a strong willed leader and now consider myself an advocate for the children within our community whom have a disability. It is important

that I continue along the same road as my parents in promoting sports equality for children of any ability. While I continue down the same road, I am creating my own new path. I am branching out as my own self, in my journey to spread awareness to the community. As I start my own life here in Monterey, I know that I still have the support of my family, but I now have a stronger faith in my abilities, and know that I can tackle the many challenges that I may face on this road to sports equality.

The department, along with certain learning requirements, has helped me prepare for this long journey. As my college career begins to wind down, I am reflecting on the many learning opportunities that I have faced in recent years. Our major requires that we fulfill certain aspects of our education through major goals. These MLO's, also known as Major Learning Outcomes has allowed for me to grow as a person, as I prepare to enter the work force.

### **MLO 1: Developing Educator**

Throughout the course of the four years here on campus, my learning has required me to write, speak, and advocate for the California schools systems, as we promote a fair and equal education for all. Through service learning, and other community based services, we are able to take what we have learned through the school systems, to better prepare us to become the educators we wish to be. Our classes have prepared us to advocate for the schools as we have become more knowledgeable on the goals we hope to achieve within the classroom. As educators we have a responsibility to serve the public's children to help them get the best education possible, and this was all thanks to the department's ability to help develop us into great educators.

### **MLO 2: Diversity and Multicultural Scholar**

The most important MLO to my education and to my capstone in particular was MLO 2, which is the Diversity and Multicultural Scholar. This outcome has been practiced over the course of my four years here. The University itself stresses the importance of diversity and multiculturalism. While I still practice the multiculturalism methods through the diversity of this region, I feel I was able to excel in the diversity aspect. This capstone project has allowed me to take my experiences influenced by the world around me, and has allowed me to examine and evaluate the society we live in. It was through this concept that I discovered the inequalities that many students face within the public education system. To help better our societies education system, we must foster and help every child grow, regardless of ability. Students with special needs deserve the same opportunities in life, which is even implemented by state law. Through this course, we have been able to take societies methods and practices and altered them to help better suit the population that we are trying to help serve.

### **MLO 3: Innovative Technological Practitioner**

As our society advances, it is important that we as scholars grow with the times. Even since I was in primary school, technology has developed and changed the way we work within the classroom. CSUMB has done an excellent job in educating us as future teachers to use these technological advances to our advantage to support our students in the best way possible. This school has used technology to help our education as well by using new methods to support our lessons. The usage of social media and online sources, such as blogs, has helped develop us into well-rounded professionals. I feel confident in my abilities to use technology in the classroom. Our knowledge of technology was also

extremely helpful, as we used social media and online resources to advocate for our capstone project.

#### **MLO 4: Social Justice Collaborator**

MLO four has also helped me to grow into an aspiring teacher. As a Social Justice Collaborator, I feel confident with my connection with my local community. As we fight for social change, I realize that while in school I have been well prepared in my ability to advocate for the need to provide equal sports opportunities for students within the public education system. I have learned to collaborate with different groups of people, in what seems like very unlikely places, to help achieve community goals. This concept was important for tackling this capstone project, as we have had to work together with multiple parties to achieve our goals to create equality.

#### **MLO 5: Subject Matter Generalist**

The classes that we have taken allowed us to become well-rounded students, which will translate to well-rounded educators. The classes we were required to take were general and broad. While no class went too far into detail, it allowed us to get a firm grasp on the many subjects we will be teaching in an elementary classroom. I feel confident in my abilities to know and teach these different subjects to my students because of the classes I have taken in the past four years.

As I continue on to a higher education I feel confident in my abilities. Even though I am an aspiring teacher, I will forever be a student who is dedicated to learning and growing. The next steps of my education are going to prove to be difficult, but I feel I am on the path to becoming the professional I aspire to be. Through this capstone, I have gained confidence, as well as a better understanding to the social injustices that our



public school systems face. With this new knowledge, I will use it to persevere and continue to fight to end this struggle.

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