

## Re-Imagining Disability in H&PE

As a provincial subject association for Health and Physical Education, Ophea recognizes that the historical structures and systems still used within our sector have the potential to cause harm to many students. This is true for students with visible and invisible disabilities; and especially true for those who also experience marginalization based on the other intersecting identities they hold. Practices within Health and Physical Education often reflect the assumption that all bodies should function in the same way and share the same capabilities. Too often, the emphasis is placed on the best possible product (speed, height, strength), rather than on the process of learning a skill that values the capabilities of every student, disabled and non-disabled.

Ophea reaffirms that every student, regardless of ability, deserves quality Health and Physical Education where they feel they belong. Feelings of belonging are foundational to student learning, and expand access to the social, emotional, and physiological benefits of healthy, active living. When students explore Health and Physical Education in identify-affirming spaces, they develop healthy, active habits for life.

Students with disabilities frequently experience significant barriers to participation in Health and Physical Education because of stigma, prejudice, and assumptions rooted in the extreme valorization of “exceptional” physical ability in our subject area. As such, they are often discouraged from taking Health and Physical Education (missing out entirely on foundational health and physical literacy skills), or are overtly excluded or sidelined in their classes, observing while other students participate; or are segregated rather than intentionally included in the learning.

As we work to create inclusive spaces that expand student access to feelings of belonging and participation in Health and Physical Education, we must move towards practices that affirm and support every student, through purposeful and intentional planning, that maximize the opportunities and experiences for every student.

---

This statement was developed in collaboration with various stakeholders, subject matter experts (including those with lived experience), and community partners.