Guidelines for Students with Disabilities on Science Olympiad Teams

Students with Disabilities at School

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 protects the rights of individuals with disabilities in programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance, including federal funds. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) enforces Section 504 in programs and activities that receive funds from ED. Recipients of these funds include public school districts, institutions of higher education, and other state and local education agencies.

Learn more:

https://www.ed.gov/laws-and-policy/individuals-disabilities/section-504

While participating in Science Olympiad team practice at a school, a student with disabilities should be afforded their agreed-upon accommodations according to his/her 504 or IEP Plan (extracurricular activities of the school, including sports and academic clubs, are part of this protection). Note that inclusion as part of a Science Olympiad team does not in any way guarantee a student's place on a competition roster. Team selection is the purview of a team coach.

Students with Disabilities at Science Olympiad Tournaments

Science Olympiad is a private 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization, and therefore is *not required by law* to provide at off-site Science Olympiad Tournaments the exact accommodations that public schools provide under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. That being said, for the past 40 years Science Olympiad has been extremely supportive of including students with disabilities on Science Olympiad teams. Thousands of examples exist of students with disabilities joining Science Olympiad, then learning, thriving, and winning! The wide variety of Science Olympiad content allows students with disabilities to select STEM events that showcase their skills. Science Olympiad is by definition a TEAM activity, therefore a student with a disability can work with another student to assist with tasks like moving, reading, writing, or doing hands-on lab tasks. Rely on each other's strengths!

Here are some **guidelines** for Coaches and Tournament Directors for students with disabilities hoping to *compete at a Science Olympiad Tournament*; these are suggestions only and should not be considered or quoted as policy:

- Each instance of a student with a disability requesting accommodations at a Science Olympiad tournament should be reviewed and handled on an individual, case-by-case basis.

- A Science Olympiad team coach (not a parent) should reach out to the Science Olympiad Tournament Director to share information, as approved by the student and student's family, about the Science Olympiad team member's school-verified, on-file need for accommodation, at least one month (suggested) in advance of competition.

- A list of potential events the student will participate in should be shared with the Tournament Director, and accommodations can be discussed. Event Supervisors must be given time to address and potentially meet the accommodation request.

- No student with a disability or a coach should approach an Event Supervisor on the day of competition to request accommodations (needs time to verify and plan); requests need to go through the Tournament Director.

- Science Olympiad is not mandated to provide interpreters, readers, or other individuals to provide services on-site.

- Not every accommodation afforded by a school to a student with disabilities can be replicated in a Science Olympiad setting due to format, cost, or safety regulations. Not every request for accommodation can or will be granted at a Science Olympiad Tournament.

- Students with disabilities may bring their own assistive technology if it does not interfere with the running of the Science Olympiad event or affect the safety of the student or other students. Separate rooms may be considered for participation. Please give the Tournament Director notice ahead of time.

- Sample types of accommodation include: given advance notice, an Event Supervisor prints out a large-font-size test or allows a magnifying device (assistive technology) to be brought in by a student who is visually impaired; a hearing-impaired student might bring and use an amplification system or be accompanied by an interpreter.

- Being granted an accommodation for a Science Olympiad event does not guarantee placement on the Science Olympiad team roster; those decisions are made solely at the school/building level.

Drafted by the Science Olympiad Executive Board
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