



Georgia Schools Receive Close to \$380,000 to Continue Adapted Sports Interscholastic Programming, through American Association of Adapted Sports Programs ASPIRE Grants

Atlanta, December 19, 2022—Ten School Systems and RESAs across the state have been awarded ASPIRE Grants by the American Association of Adapted Sports Programs (AAASP), thanks to funding made possible through the Georgia Department of Education. The funds will be used to purchase sport wheelchairs and adapted equipment for students and student-athletes with physical disabilities.

The American Association of Adapted Sports (AAASP) just celebrated its 25th year in Georgia as the infrastructure (similar to the Georgia High School Association (GHSA) or NCAA,) that makes it possible for school systems and school co-ops to implement and sustain programs in adapted athletics, health and fitness in a league format, each adhering to the same policies, standards and guidelines for competition.

The systems, listed below, have been providing access to athletics to the physically-disabled, through their programs for years, which makes these grants so significant to update equipment, and fulfill needs of the growing programs. Two of grants, the RESA grants, will help grow the programming in new areas of the state. Students practice weekly with games held on Saturday in each of the 3 ten- week seasons that include wheelchair handball (Fall) , wheelchair basketball (Winter) and wheelchair football (Spring). Through the AAASP/GHSA Alliance, state championships follow each sport season and these student are afforded the same standings and titles as their non disabled peers.

In Georgia, there are girls sports teams, boys sport teams, and adapted sports teams for boys and girls - each of these recognizing the unique abilities of the groups they serve. “This is what the New Inclusion looks like in athletics,” said Tommie Storms, Cofounder and Executive Director of AAASP. “Students with a physical disability, who can participate on a traditional team at school, should absolutely have access to that opportunity. But more often, where he or she cannot do so safely or without changing the nature of the sport offered to the non-disabled due to his participation, there is the additional option of adapted sports where the disabled are afforded the same rights and opportunities as their non-disabled peers to compete for titles and enjoy the benefits of better health through regular exercise.

Congratulations to the AAASP ASPIRE Recipients:

Atlanta Public Schools	\$31,046.00
Clayton County Public Schools	\$29,991.35
DeKalb County Schools	\$25,942.31
Gwinnett County Public Schools	\$43,185.98
Henry County Schools	\$35,009.47
Houston County Schools	\$30,209.05
Muscogee County School District	\$33,967.09
Troup County Schools	\$33,972.35
New RESA Program (Regional)(First District – Savannah area)	\$30,568.86
New RESA Program (Regional)(Northeast)	\$30,568.86
AAASP Equipment & Tech	\$37,618.11

****NOTE: The above sums do NOT reflect sales taxes paid on these items.**

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Dr. Deborah Shapiro, Associate Professor, Department of Kinesiology and Health at Georgia State University testified recently before the Georgia Legislature, where the request for funding originated, noting that studies have found that students participating in AAASP member school programs are shown to enjoy improved grades, fewer absentees from school, less hospitalizations due to their disability, higher graduation rates and they also become eligible for athletic scholarships at any of over a dozen colleges around the nation who offer wheelchair basketball or track and field to disabled collegiate athletes.

The funding includes new uniforms and in some cases new storage and transport options, designed to reduce the use of school buses to transport equipment to games held around the state. This can reduce costs associated with maintaining the programs annually.

Storms said the one-time funding award is the culmination of years of effort. One hundred percent of the infrastructure that is AAASP was defunded by the State DOE in the economic downturn of 2008, risking the total collapse of the then 36 school programs around the state. “For over a decade now, our school members have taken extraordinary steps to insure their programs remained viable and available to these families and students, so this recognition and support by state leaders is a real blessing and so appreciated.”

A two-time National Program Winner (AAHPERD-SHAPE), honored as “unique and significant” and a top 100 program of over 1600 reviewed in 1999 by the Ford Foundation’s “Innovations in American Government Award” administered through the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, AAASP operates only as a membership of Georgia schools, but offers training to anyone, anywhere who wishes to create the same of similar efforts elsewhere. The AAASP model allows for over 40 varying types of physical disabilities to be represented in comprising local teams. “This “cross-disability” approach has proven to be a game changer for schools and communities who have sought for decades to build local opportunities versus the high costs of travel and lodging required for what around the nation remains mostly regional and national competition options for these populations,” said Storms.

AAASP should not be confused with BlazeSports. While both organizations are legacies of the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games, AAASP is an **interscholastic** athletic association (grades 1-12) and the infrastructure through which school teams can form, thrive and follow standardized policies and rules for competition. BlazeSports is a community-based organization serving adults, veterans and youth, competing regionally, nationally and internationally.

AAASP differs from Special Olympics in that its athletes do not have a cognitive impairment, only a physical disability. Participants in Special Olympics must have an IQ of 70 or below to be eligible.

To learn more about AAASP, please visit: <https://adaptedsports.org> .

The American Association of Adapted Sports Programs (AAASP), headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, is a not-for-profit association dedicated to developing interscholastic adapted sports programs in partnership with national, state, and local educational agencies. It represents a standardized approach to extracurricular adapted team sports and has developed one of the nation's most comprehensive school-based athletic programs for students with physical disabilities attending elementary, middle or high school. For more information, please visit our website at <http://adaptedsports.org> or join our conversations on Twitter at: @AdaptedSports.

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