

# School District Students: Independent Living Skills Classes



The Independent Living Skills classes have been using the pool regularly for the past few years. It has been found to be beneficial to the students in many ways. As drowning is one of the leading causes of death for children with autism, learning to swim is not only a life skill but a life-saving skill. Swimming develops motor skills and provides an opportunity for excellence among people with Down Syndrome, autism, and even attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder.

Everyone needs satisfying leisure time, and once a student learns to swim, it can become a lifelong source of enjoyment. The students in the Independent Living Skills classroom look forward to swimming weekly, and mention it often between swim days. Swimming for the students is a stress-reducer, a place to improve swimming skills, an opportunity for social interaction, and in general promotes health. Each student swims a set number of laps based on individual ability and then afterward is allowed free time to play with others. According to LDOonline, "Children, adolescents, and adults with learning disabilities may find themselves with limited opportunities to fully enjoy leisure time. A lack of perceptual, motor, memory, linguistic, or organizational skills may cause them as much difficulty for leisure as they have at school or work." Swimming becomes even more important for students who don't have the usual outlets for leisure activities, and swim days are a great motivator for students.

Recreational swimming provides many other benefits for people with disabilities. For example, it is a learning experience. Learning to float, stroke development, and breathing skills all support brain function. Increased lung capacity, reduced resting heart rates and lowered blood pressure are all present in people who swim recreationally. Moderate physical activity can improve mental health as well. These are benefits for anyone who chooses to participate in swimming, but for someone with a cognitive disability, those benefits become magnified as self-confidence is increased and new skills are acquired.

Socially swimming gives the students an opportunity to relate to one another on a completely different level than they do in the classroom or at the lunch table. They help each other stay on track when they are swimming laps, they play together, and they enjoy everyone else's company in a way that is more casual than in other environments. Physically, they are exercising in a place where they are comfortable and one they enjoy. Cognitively, they are able to practice what they know and extend themselves to new challenges.

Overall, swimming has been a wonderful addition to the students' schedules. They look forward to it, they enjoy it, and it's an irreplaceable way for them to understand that they can accomplish goals.